

丈 月 城 著 BUNBUN 絵

クロニクル・レギオン

CHRONICLE LEGION

皇国の志士たち

3



THE ROAD OF CONQUEST

JOE TAKEDUKI

&

BUNBUN

PRESENTS

ダッシュエックス文庫

The cover art features two anime-style characters. On the left is a young woman with long, dark blue hair and green eyes, wearing a dark blue and gold military-style uniform. On the right is a young man with short, dark blue hair, wearing a similar uniform. They are both looking towards the center. The background is a mix of dark blue and white with some glowing blue particles.

クロニクル・レギオン

CHRONICLE LEGION

皇国の志士たち

3



丈 月 城 著 絵 BUNBUN

エレノア

大英帝国の聖獣『黄金獅子』
スライオンズ
プリンセス
の血を引く王女。対象を魅了し、意のままに操る念導術「魅了の呪縛」を使う『魔法女』。

橘 征継

たちばなまさつぐ

新東海道軍・特務騎士団『新撰組』の副長に就任。未だ記憶は戻らないが、幕末の英雄ひじかたとしやう土方歳三として志緒理の側に侍る。

りんどう

竜胆先生

駿河で隠居中の謎多き老人で、無類の酒好き。実年齢とかけ離れた容姿をしている。藤宮家の後見人であり、志緒理の念導術の師匠でもある。

えいせい

衛青

東方ローマ帝国所属の復活者。
前漢の時代に活躍した大英傑だが、本人は目立つのを嫌い控えめにふるまう。





「お、おはようございます……。あ、これはどういうことなのでしょっ。」

あきがせりつか

秋ヶ瀬立夏

ふじのみやしおり

藤宮志緒理

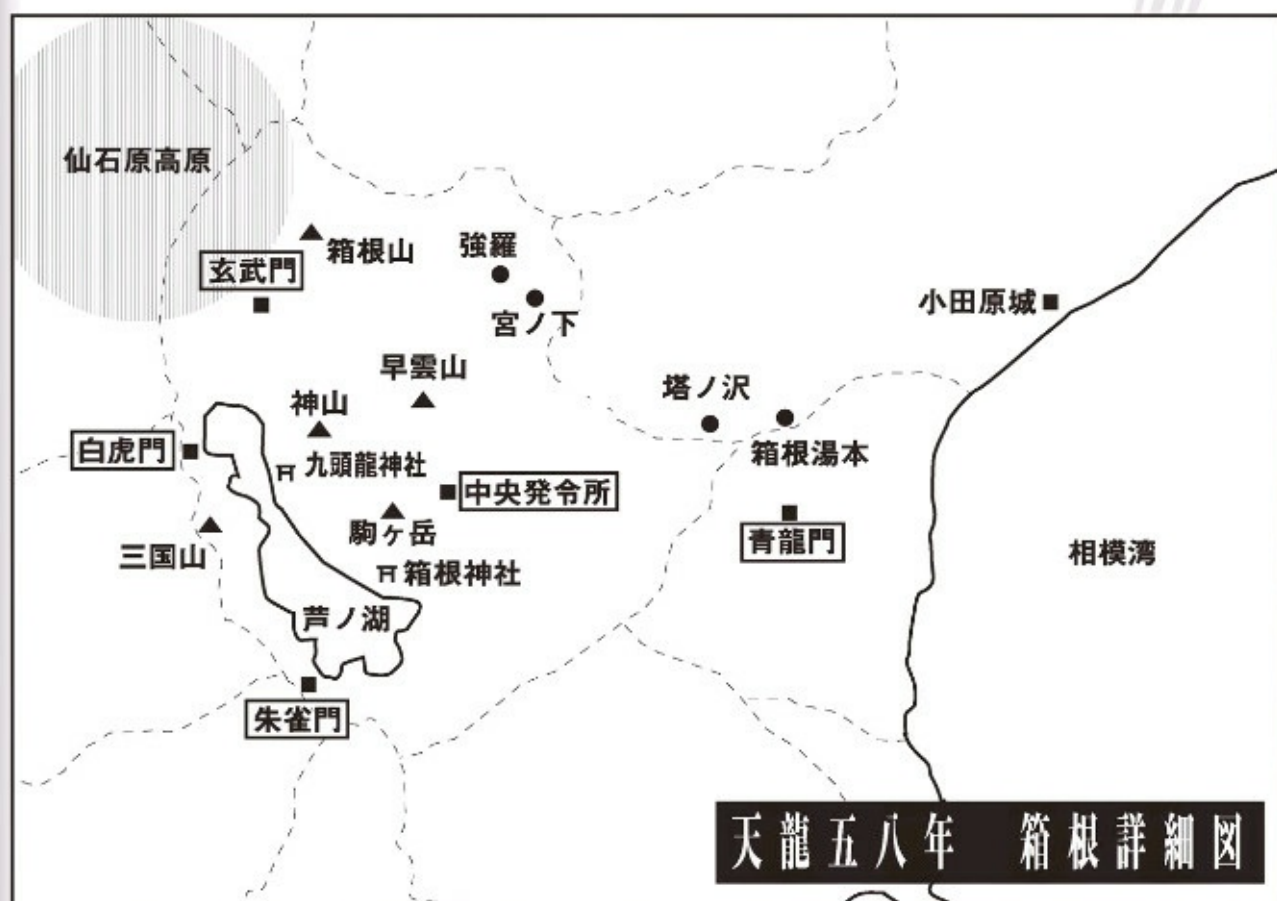
たちばなはつね

橘初音



天龍五八年 皇国日本・東海道詳細図





Prologue

The biggest lake in the Kantō Fiefdom was Kasumigaura.

From here, it was possible to go sightseeing at the imperial capital of Tokyo and return on the same day. In other words, it was not far from the heart of Imperial Japan.

However, it was definitely an undeveloped rural region.

The lush natural environment here did not have any high-rise buildings. Traffic was extremely low without any congestion whatsoever. The cars on the road drove very fast.

And currently, *a certain man* was at a ranch near Kasumigaura.

Dairy cows were kept at the ranch along with animals such as horses and sheep.

The sight of cattle grazing leisurely was quite a pastoral scene. The inorganic office zones and trendy shopping districts would offer no such idyllic atmosphere.

Speaking of the countryside, one would inevitably come across youngsters yearning for urban prosperity.

"When I finish high school, I'm gonna study in Tokyo too~"

"Oh, I remember there's a girl whose family runs a restaurant by the national highway. Didn't she enroll in something like a hairdressing school at the capital? Is that your plan too?"

Hearing a second grader girl's declaration, he smiled and replied.

Although he was living a life akin to seclusion, he was not a man without social skills.

Knowing the local gossip about his neighbors was only par for the course.

However, his eight-year-old "female friend" pouted indignantly, displeased with his perfectly ordinary comment.

"Not something like. She went to a professional school for training beauticians. Don't get it wrong~!"

"...You're right. That is definitely what I heard recently."

Corrected by the young girl, he shrugged.

Once again, he was confronted by the fact that he had not only arrived in a distant foreign land—but also future world he could never have imagined.

Incidentally, this little female friend was the ranch owner's daughter.

This man had also spent his youth as a shepherd in remote mountains. Perhaps because of that, he found ranches to be quite nostalgic. Of course, this was only relative to other places in the modern world.

"Have you been to Tokyo?"

"Only five or six times? You see, Oji-san here was never used to big cities... So I've never wanted to live there."

"...Oji-san?"

The girl made a questioning look.

"Did I say something weird?"

"Yup, you called yourself 'Oji-san' when you're younger than my dad. It's really weird. You should call yourself 'Onii-san'."

"Hahahaha... I'm only young in appearance, you know?"

In his previous life, he had passed away in his late forties.

For some reason, he had revived with a body in his twenties. This disparity between age at death and current appearance seemed to be quite common among Resurrectees.

Then he noticed that the girl was looking up at his wryly smiling face.

"What's the matter?"

"In Tokyo, do they have many *ikemen* like Onii-san?"

"*Ike, men?* You mean good-looking guys, right? For an eight-year-old girl to be curious about this kind of thing, I don't know if I should worry for the future or lament how the world has changed..."

"What are you talking about!? This is very important~!"

"Uh, sorry, you are very right."

The girl's surprisingly stern scolding made him involuntarily apologize in earnest.

"It is possible for the beauty of a face to bring not only unexpected glory and splendor but also ruin and destruction. On further thought, it's a lesson that my clan should absolutely not forget."

He had always lived by keeping a low profile, unwilling to attract attention.

However, his face frequently drew stares from ladies. This was due to his facial resemblance to his elder sister, a renowned beauty.

"Some people in weird clothing are coming... Are they students?"

"Oh, no. Those are military uniforms."

"Liar. The men at the fort don't dress like this."

"Those aren't Imperial Japan's uniforms but Eastern Rome's... It's the Empire's military uniform."

Two men in military uniform approached.

Imperial Japan's military organizations could be roughly divided between the Imperial Guard, which served the imperial family directly, and the provincial armies of the Twelve Fiefdoms. These separate organizations all shared a common uniform.

Ignoring the stylistic differences between those of officers and common soldiers, the Japanese uniform's chic design was primarily black.

However, the arriving men were wearing uniforms featuring blue blazers.

Their neckties were red. This was the officer's uniform of the Eastern Roman military.

"I still don't think those clothes look good on me at all."

He was currently wearing a navy-blue jacket with beige cotton pants.

These ordinary garments were bought from a discount store and not fancy at all, but he liked their advantages of being modest and convenient.

Besides, he had grown tired of wearing military uniforms and armor a long time ago.

A feeling of resignation rose up.

Looks like his "days of seclusion" were coming to an end.

Not surprised, he knew this would be coming eventually. Ever since last month when the British Empire and the Kinai Fiefdom had joined forces to establish the Restoration Alliance...

He knew he was going to be summoned—

He was the "hidden trump card" Generalissimo Caesar had placed in rural Kantō. This man, who enjoyed idyllic life in the countryside, had been ready to enter Tokyo at a moment's notice...

"Time to work, huh?" He muttered to himself and nodded to greet the approaching Roman soldiers.

Chapter 1 - The Fall of Nagoya Castle

Part 1

November 7th, 15:45.

"Nagoya is Tōkaidō's provincial capital..."

The location was the main keep of Nagoya Castle. The man occupying the position of Governor General of the Tōkaidō Fiefdom was at the castle's highest balcony, gnashing his teeth. Slender and crane-like in appearance, he was an old man with a blazing gaze.

Dressed in a kimono with an Inverness coat, he was a man of striking impression.

"Never did I expect it would fall to an enemy of a thousand..."

Governor General Akigase Shouzan, ruler of Tōkaidō, remarked in self-mockery.

Currently, "winged giant soldiers" were fighting in the skies over Nagoya.

The invader was the Restoration Alliance. Ten Kinai Chevaliers were leading roughly five hundred Kamuys to attack in concert with the British Empire's six Knights of Her Majesty and the five hundred Crusades under their command.

A mixture of Anglo-Japanese Legions had formed a coalition force of a thousand.

In contrast, on the defending side, the Tōkaidō Fiefdom had a total of sixteen Chevaliers with roughly seven hundred Kamuys.

A great battle was taking place in the sky over Nagoya between a total of

seventeen hundred Legions, friend and foe combined.

"Is it impossible to oppose the British Empire when they invade in earnest?"

Akigase Shouzan muttered to himself, his voice filled with poignancy.

On the morning of November 7th, the Restoration Alliance finally started to launch a full offensive against Nagoya and its surroundings.

There were five "tutelary forts" in the region.

These tutelary forts were modernized strongholds created by repairing and remodeling ancient castles and stationing ifrits as guardian deities. The water shrines built underground allowed them to function as bases from where Chevaliers and Legions, the mainstay weapon of modern militaries, could operate.

Namely, Okazaki Castle, Kariya Castle, Kiyosu Castle, Inuyama Castle, and Nagoya Castle.

The Restoration Alliance directly attacked the defensive net formed by these five castles.

Leading five hundred Kamuys, the Kinai Fiefdom had invaded from west of Nagoya. Leading five hundred Crusades, the British Empire's six Knights of Her Majesty attacked from the east.

Nagoya was caught in the middle between the two fronts. Naturally, the enemy's ultimate target was Nagoya Castle, which was the Tōkaidō Governor General's residence and administrative center, the most vital location.

The Restoration Alliance had broken through the Tōkaidō provincial army's defenses to close in on Nagoya Castle.

However, the castles of Okazaki, Kariya, Kiyosu, and Inuyama had also sent Chevaliers leading Kamuy armies as reinforcements to rescue Nagoya Castle.

"The Crusades are truly powerful... No, it is the Knights of Her Majesty who are powerful."

The tide of battle was clear to see. Tōkaidō was obviously at a disadvantage.

"Is it all due to the difference in practical battlefield experience?"

The Restoration Alliance and the Tōkaidō provincial army had given up on formations.

The Legions were scattered about, fighting in close quarters. All over the Nagoya sky, Kamuys were getting defeated by British Crusades.

The Crusades were a size larger than the diminutive Kamuy in physique.

In terms of power output and pure combat strength alone, the Crusades were superior. Furthermore, the Knights of Her Majesty in command all had plenty of field experience and Chevalier Strengths over 90.

Imperial Japan did not have many Chevaliers capable of standing up to them.

"Inferiority in both strength and numbers, such adversity is truly impossible to overcome," Shouzan said quietly.

Also, the Charter of Chivalry imposed several restrictions on attacking civilian buildings.

When fighting in the sky over a city such as Nagoya, intentional destruction of the urban landscape below was forbidden. Indeed, *intentional destruction*.

For the sake of argument, consider the case of a Legion that had been shot or stabbed.

Unable to sustain flight, the Legion would crash to the ground, its gigantic body and armor crushing buildings in the process. Such cases were accepted as exceptions by the Charter of Chivalry and freed of responsibility.

Currently, the falling Kamuys and Crusades were mercilessly crushing Nagoya's streets.

Fortunately, dead or injured Legions did not explode, but they were still eight-meter-tall giants after all. Their corpses weighed dozens of tons.

Many buildings were smashed by the falling Legions, possibly killing people who had not fled to underground shelters in time.

"The Knights of Her Majesty broke through our defenses, then the Kinai forces invaded... This simple approach totally relies on the British."

Akigase Shouzan scoffed in disdain.

"However, no matter what the defeated side says, it would amount to nothing more than a loser's complaints."

Both Kinai and Tōkaidō were using Kamuys, the blue Legions of Imperial Japan. When civil war broke out, it was common for the aggressor to add fabric strips or extra garments to distinguish themselves.

In this case, the Kinai Kamuys were wearing *red scarfs*.

"What a disgrace. I failed to devise a single effective measure despite knowing of the enemy's imminent invasion. This incompetence is unacceptable."

"Your Excellency..." Nagoya's castellan bowed his head in anguish.

Shouzan continued, "The Kinai Fiefdom is backed by the British Empire, which means we need support from either Tōsandō or Kantō. However, I exhausted all manner of demands and negotiation methods and still they refused to be swayed..."

"I believe the Tōsandō Fiefdom is leaning towards the Restoration Alliance."

"This is currently unverifiable. Please watch your words."

Shouzan warned the castellan then proceeded to go on a sarcastic diatribe.

"Speaking of which, that fiefdom apparently feels dissatisfied because they received a landlocked realm of mountains back when the lands were divided among the vassals... It would come as no surprise if they actually are colluding with the Restoration Alliance in secret. As for the Kantō Fiefdom—It must be their old habit acting up again. Always sucking up to those women of the imperial palace, only wanting to leave all military matters to Rome."

"Your Excellency, you apparently need to exercise prudence in your words too..."

"Oh, indeed, let us return to the topic at hand. Well, since we cannot rely on the neighboring fiefdoms, Tōkaidō's only choice is to turn to Rome for help." Shouzan shrugged. "But asking them for aid would run the risk of making Rome our master."

"Just like how the Kinai Fiefdom is currently obeying the British military's every word... Right?"

"As dogs of Rome, those Kantō people are no better. No matter, regardless, we no longer have the luxury of waiting for reinforcements."

"All we can do is try our best and see how long we can hold." The castellan quietly expressed his determination, then said, "If only Rikka-sama were here."

"Even with her here, she can't turn the battle around on her own... Wait, I recall that she sent a letter whose contents I found rather intriguing."

Rikka was Akigase Shouzan's eldest child.

Although she was the beloved daughter born to Shouzan in his later years, she was definitely not a sheltered lady.

Matching any man in valor, Rikka was Tōkaidō's premier Chevalier and normally posted at Nagoya Castle.

Unfortunately, she was trapped by the Restoration Alliance at Suruga City, serving as the temporary castellan at the tutelary fort there.

In truth, out of Shouzan's retainers, his daughter was the most powerful warrior of them all.

The two younger brothers were no match for their eldest sister. The gap in their talent as generals was as great as between heaven and earth.

Regarding the name of "Hijikata Toshizō" mentioned by his beloved daughter —

Unfortunately, Shouzan did not have time to ponder it.

A ring was heard at the scene. A pipe fox had teleported to arrive.

The palm-size retainer beast released noetic waves to project the words of a message into the air.

'Partial destruction of noesis barrier. A force of Kamuys have invaded Nagoya Castle.'

"They are finally here...!"

Like ordinary tutelary forts, Nagoya Castle had a guardian deity stationed there.

Its name was the ifrit Nue, named after the monster that had appeared at the

Emperor's residence of Seiryō-den in the past. The western equivalent in mythology would be the chimera.

The Nue featured a monkey's face, a tanuki's body, a tiger's limbs, and a tail in the shape of a snake.

This ifrit had deployed a noesis barrier to cover the castle.

This barrier was essentially the final defense line. The invading enemy's first priority would be to take over the underground water shrine and capture Governor General Akigase Shouzan.

"No need to protect me. You should go to the front line and focus on defending the castle."

"Affirmative."

Unlike his daughter, Akigase Shouzan did not possess a Chevalier's power. Instead, he left the fighting to his trusted retainers while shouldering all outcomes and responsibilities himself.

Both Shouzan and the castellan were in their late sixties, from the same generation.

Having known each other for so long, the castellan responded concisely and prepared to set off.

Before leaving, the castellan noticed an army of Legions flying at high speed towards Nagoya Castle from the east.

On a chaotic battlefield where friend and foe were mixed together, this army was packed in a wedge formation.

The orderly army was particularly conspicuous and consisted of about a hundred Legions. All of them blue samurai of Imperial Japan, they were Kamuys. But were they Kinai's or Tōkaidō's reinforcements?

"That is—Rikka-sama's army!"

The castellan yelled excitedly. His keen senses as a Chevalier had detected Rikka's noetic waves.

Shouzan hastily took out his binoculars.

Through the lenses, he observed the gradually approaching army. Standing at the head of the formation was indeed his beloved daughter. She was dressed in Imperial Japan's military uniform, riding a blue wyvern.

"Did she rush here from Suruga knowing that Nagoya is in trouble?"

Despite the female warrior's gallant arrival, Shouzan shook his head.

"What is she doing? Reinforcements of this number will not change the fate of Nagoya's fall."

Rikka's Chevalier Strength was 154, no less than any Knight of Her Majesty.

However, this quantity was still not enough to overturn the battle situation. The father frowned at his daughter's heroic but reckless act of bravery.

"Watch out, Your Excellency!"

A Crusade came flying and the castellan shouted sharply.

The Crusade raised its rifle to fire repeatedly while flying towards Shouzan's balcony. The enemy must have been drawn to the conspicuous main keep.

The scorching beams were being fired at the balcony with a rate of ten times per second.

Normally speaking, this situation would mean certain death, but fortunately, the castellan reacted appropriately.

"In the name of Zuihou, the appellation of the warrior—Assemble, Kamuys!"

The castellan swiftly summoned three Kamuys to block in front of the balcony.

Using themselves as shields, the blue samurai defended the balcony. Shot in the face and torso, the three Legions died in sacrifice, but they also raised their rifles to strike back.

One shot pierced the Crusade's throat, resulting in mutual annihilation—

The castellan had averted disaster in the nick of time. However, both the elderly decorated Chevalier and Shouzan were shocked.

"Your Excellency!?"

"Argh!?"

One of the Crusade's stray shots had struck the roof of the main keep.

A large amount of timber, tiles, and other debris was falling from the collapsing roof and onto the balcony where Shouzan and the castellan were. The two of them were buried alive under the rubble...

It was ten minutes later when they were finally rescued by the soldiers rushing to the scene.

The castellan only suffered light injuries with bruises all over him, but Shouzan was in no state to get up on his own—

Part 2

Slightly earlier...

"We should head to Nagoya too."

It was the morning of November 7th when Tachibana Masatsugu had asserted that.

It was 9:13am at the time. Several hours earlier, he had just defeated the thousand Legions led by King Richard the Lionheart to invade Suruga.

Today, Richard was originally supposed to attack Nagoya too.

However, the Suruga side had succeeded in provoking his passion, setting his heart ablaze. With less than half a day before the Nagoya operation, he went straight for Suruga, unable to suppress his urge to go for a "secret snack"...

The two sides had fought a nocturnal battle.

Fighting bravely throughout the night, the forces of the Suruga tutelary fort won at last.

While everyone was celebrating the hard-earned victory, they received news that "the Restoration Alliance was beginning to march on Nagoya." As soon as Masatsugu heard it, he expressed his view.

Suruga's castellan, Akigase Rikka, tilted her head in puzzlement and asked, "You mean we will go to participate in the battle at Nagoya?"

"Precisely."

"Masatsugu-dono, to be honest, there isn't any point, is there?"

All of Suruga's Chevaliers had gathered this morning for a war council.

The ones present were respectively Masatsugu, Rikka, Tachibana Hatsune, as well as the two Chevaliers from Yamanashi, Habuna and Maike, with the additional presence of Alexis Yang, the military adviser sent by the Eastern

Roman Empire.

Of course, the noble princess of Imperial Japan, Fujinomiya Shiori was present too— House Akigase's Chevalier princess address the group calmly, "Last night, we lost a great number of Legions. My Kamuys are down to a hundred or so. I suppose Masatsugu-dono's Kanesadas are not available in decent numbers either?"

"Rikka-sama," Hatsune spoke up timidly. "What you mean is going there will be useless?"

"...Something like that. Given the current circumstances, if the Restoration Alliance—or rather, the British forces—were to get serious, there is no way for us to reverse the fate of Nagoya's fall no matter how we struggle. Should any of us fall in battle, it would be far worse than losing Nagoya."

Nagoya was Akigase Rikka's hometown and Nagoya Castle was her home.

However, she spoken with great detachment to explain why they should not head to the rescue. Her extraordinary qualities as a general were what allowed her to suppress her personal feelings regarding the matter.

Hatsune looked sadly at her senior knight.

Remaining calm and indifferent, Rikka continued to analyze. "Nagoya is quite far away from Suruga. Moving across a long distance in one go will be very draining on Legions. Masatsugu-dono, why don't we observe the situation for now instead?"

Just as Masatsugu was about to reply, Shiori spoke first, "Indeed... Rikka-sama, you make a firm case."

The noble and intelligent Shiori was well-versed in politics and strategy.

The bloodline of Lord Tenryuu the sacred beast had given her a head of platinum blonde hair as well as outstanding special powers.

As a result, every Chevalier here would listen to her seriously and consider her opinion. However, Alexis Yang was staring at Shiori's pretty face in amusement.

"Suruga currently lacks usable troops, an expedition to Nagoya would impose a heavy burden on Suruga, and we do not have sufficient power to turn the tide

in the overall situation. However..."

Shiori's clear eyes gazed at Masatsugu.

This was a steadfast gaze with deep faith in her subordinate's abilities.

"Masatsugu-sama, you believe that... doing so will produce definite benefits, don't you?"

"Yes, *in order to make effective use of the opportunity before us*, we must make a trip to Nagoya."

Masatsugu's tone was calm without any zeal.

However, the word "opportunity" had caught everyone's attention. The other Chevaliers leaned forward, waiting for Masatsugu to speak.

"I see now," Alexis Yang said with delight after listening to Masatsugu's explanation. "I believe that this excellent idea is worth a try. Say, rather than an opportunity, I'd call it a challenge instead."

Several hours later, Rikka led an army of a hundred Kamuys and charged into Nagoya.

"To think he came up with something this outrageous so quickly after last night's battle..."

This morning, Masatsugu had provided a battle plan.

Rikka could not help but smile wryly at the thought of that plan. The staff officer from the Roman military was right. Making effective use of *this shred of luck that could barely be called an opportunity* would require a challenge as risky as walking on thin ice.

The first challenge was the expedition to Nagoya.

First of all, Rikka must sortie in secret.

The Restoration Alliance's scouts would notice if she openly marched out of the Suruga tutelary fort.

Rikka summoned a hundred Kamuys, applied stealth noetic techniques on them, then sent them underwater into Suruga Bay in batches of ten.

Flying in the sky without cover would be extremely easy for the enemy to spot.

After that, her army entered the mountains from Suruga City's outskirts and went upstream along the Abe River.

Then flying at low speed along the mountain ridge of the Southern Alps, they secretly made their way to Nagoya. Rikka accompanied them on a wyvern.

In fact, movement through deep mountains was quite draining on Legions.

The local earth spirits in the mountains would entangle Legions, trying to assimilate them into becoming "companions." Eliminating interference from earth spirits required expenditure of mystic power.

In any case, Rikka's army moved west while consuming ectoplasmic fluid.

Fortunately, Rikka was able to reach the outskirts of Nagoya without being detected by scouts or noetic reconnaissance. This was probably due to the Restoration Alliance devoting their resources to their large-scale operation.

Hence, it was around 16:00 on November 7th.

A group of Crusades had broken through Nagoya Castle's noesis barrier. At the same time, Rikka's army had also entered the battlefield.

"Avoid unnecessary fighting. We will rush straight to the castle!"

Rikka rode her wyvern and led her army personally.

Aerial fights were taking place in the sky all over the metropolis of Nagoya.

Despite their disadvantage, the Tōkaidō provincial army had held their ground against the Restoration Alliance's Kamuys and Crusades. Neither side was using formations anymore.

The Legions were skirmishing, acting according to their own judgment.

Amid this chaos, Rikka's army entered a wedge formation and flew straight for Nagoya Castle.

Doing so would inevitably stand out. Lady Chevalier Rikka was also standing gallantly at the forefront of the formation *as a means of attracting even more attention*.

"Sing for me and let everyone know that I, Akigase Rikka, have returned to Nagoya!"

Her hundred Kamuys responded to her command and roared.

—Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

—Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

This was the War Cry, where Legions emitted shouts and mystic power from behind their masks.

As soon as the friendly forces of the Tōkaidō Kamuys and Chevaliers heard this fierce song of magical effect, they would instantly understand that House Akigase's eldest daughter had returned.

What Rikka was doing was alerting *allies* of her presence—

This was her true aim.

She gently kicked her wyvern's belly, ordering her mount to speed up. Having flown at low speed along the mountain ridge earlier, it had been a while since she last sliced through the wind.

The refreshing feeling made her smile. Advancing without impediment was exhilarating.

Currently, Rikka's hundred Kamuys were in a packed formation, flying through the sky as a giant wedge. Her army sliced through the battlefield and Nagoya Castle was within sight.

In order to block Rikka's army, the enemy would need to muster a packed formation too.

However, for the Crusades led by the Knights of Her Majesty, immediately organizing themselves in a formation during a chaotic battle would be quite difficult.

"My patience was worth it. This is precisely the situation I had hoped for."

Rikka grinned. She could have rushed into the battlefield earlier, but chose to bide her time instead. She was well aware that reinforcements of a mere hundred Legions would not turn the tide of battle.

Nagoya Castle—Almost there.

Rikka's conspicuous act worked. Nagoya Castle immediately disengaged the defensive noesis barrier.

"They're letting me through? Thank you so much!"

Leading a hundred Kamuys, Rikka charged into Nagoya Castle's premises.

She gazed down upon the golden carps on central keep's roof, the inner citadel, the outer citadel, the government office, the Akigase residence, the majestic Japanese garden, *etc.* She had finally "returned home."



The noesis barrier activated again. Rikka ordered her Legions.

"Scatter. Defeat any trespassing Crusades inside the castle. Your mission is to make a last stand and guard Nagoya Castle with your lives."

The hundred Kamuys behind her broke out of formation and scattered to look for signs of the enemies.

There were twenty-odd wyverns mixed in the group, carrying personnel with special skills, such as noetic officers, all of them brought her from Suruga intentionally.

They were tasked with an important mission too.

Rikka nodded and emitted noesis, issuing further orders to her Kamuys.

"Call out to the comrades of the Tōkaidō provincial army and have them assemble here. Summon all Legions and Chevaliers to return to the castle by my command."

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh—

Ohhh—

Ohhh—

The blue samurai scattered throughout the castle.

The singing from their distinctive voices, with a relaxed and pliable tone color akin to ripples on the surface of water, was gradually spreading through Nagoya City.

Part 3

As bases from where Legions operated, tutelary forts were equipped with water shrines.

A water shrine was a massive reservoir for storing artificial ectoplasmic fluid. The mysterious liquid's purpose was not only limited to supplying Legions and Chevaliers with spiritual energy.

Ectoplasmic fluid was also the energy source for fluid reactors, which generated great quantities of electrical power for surrounding regions.

In the majority of cases, tutelary forts with their water shrines also served to support the livelihoods of the nearby population in some manner. For local businesses and shops, tutelary forts were important "customers."

Essential to regional life, tutelary forts were important facilities for civilians too.

Naturally, there was a water shrine underground of Nagoya Castle too.

Inside the giant subterranean reservoir were a neat array of columns with a bath in the depths. This architectural design was universally adopted throughout the world and identical to the one at Suruga.

Rikka's forces from Suruga should be fighting bravely on ground level.

Meanwhile, Masatsugu and company were immersed in bath's vat of ectoplasmic fluid. The facility resembled a huge public bath, but the ectoplasmic fluid was ice-cold and completely different from hot water.

Soaking in ectoplasmic fluid, Masatsugu muttered to himself, "Back when my power as a Chevalier awakened, I found it quite unbelievable."

"W-What did you find unbelievable?"

He was conversing with his little sister from the Tachibana clan.

Riding wyverns, the two of them had accompanied Rikka's army.

"Just before the tutelary fort was about to fall to the British, why didn't they destroy the water shrine? Then the enemy won't be able to use it, right?"

"I-It's written in the textbook given to us during Chevalier Conferment."

"Textbook?"

"I remember it was a book on military tactics and strategy... A manual on warfare, I guess."

Hatsune cringed, avoiding eye contact with Masatsugu.

Her voice was trembling and she seemed extremely flustered.

It was rare for the cheerful and energetic girl to react this way. One could hardly blame her. Currently, she was in front of Masatsugu, completely naked while immersed in ectoplasmic fluid.

With her knees drawn up to her chest, she was sitting in the vat of ectoplasmic fluid.

In other words, she was using her legs and knees to block "critical parts" from being exposed.

Like her, Masatsugu was nude too, soaking in the vat of ectoplasmic fluid. Unlike Hatsune, he was sitting naturally in cross-legged posture, making no effort to hide himself.

"Y-You're talking about scorched earth tactics like burning food and land to prevent the enemy from using them, right? Those tactics have existed since the ancient Greeks... B-But they're forbidden in the modern world."

"Oh, you mean the Charter of Chivalry?"

"If a water shrine is damaged, life in the surrounding area could collapse. For example, the electricity supply will apparently plummet."

"Scorched earth tactics are actually pretty useful, as long as you don't get the timing wrong."

"L-Let's put that aside for now, Onii-sama."

"What's wrong?"

"Umm... Quit staring at me, okay? I'm not wearing anything..."

"I see."

"W-Why aren't you turning your face away!? I'm begging you here!"

"Sorry, your body is too beautiful. Also, you look very cute when you're shy, so I can't help myself. I don't mean any harm at all."

"Sheesh! Onii-sama, why do you say these things out of the blue!"

Masatsugu shared his perverted thoughts nonchalantly, causing Hatsune to turn her face away in exasperation.

However, he could see faint signs of delight on the side of the Tachibana little sister's face. Perhaps Masatsugu's straightforward praise had pleased her greatly.

Masatsugu was the first to break the silence.

"Sorry, but please endure this for a while longer. We need to finish the tutelary pact as quickly as possible to turn Nagoya Castle into our stronghold."

"Y-Yeah. Bathing together saves time too, I guess."

Hatsune changed her mindset and agreed.

Her embarrassment had not gone away, but she turned her thoughts to Rikka.

Rikka had sortied with her army from Suruga, created an opening leading to Nagoya Castle, and *attracted her allies' attention*. However, the Chevaliers accompanying her did not need to perform all of those tasks like her.

The plan was for Masatsugu and Hatsune to make Nagoya their stronghold first before summoning Legions.

By doing so, they could increase the number of Legions they could summon while avoiding the consumption of a long journey.

Rikka's army, fighting on the surface, was actually quite exhausted already. If the fighting dragged on too long, the enemy would eventually see through their *ploy*.

"We need to hurry and help Rikka-sama, Onii-sama!" Hatsune finally regained composure. Sitting in the pool, she said, "It's almost ready. I need to establish

the pact quickly... Upon my Appellation of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune, I pray to the local shrine of Nagoya. Pray grant me the blessing of holy water and the authorizing seal of warfare to become a war god to defend Nagoya!"

"And allow me, Tachibana Masatsugu, to join the ranks of the war gods in defense of the local land."

Hatsune shouted loudly and Masatsugu chimed in indifferently. Their bodies glowed faintly and the tutelary pact establishing Nagoya Castle as their stronghold was complete.

Hatsune clenched her fist tightly and whispered, "I feel my whole body brimming with energy. It's probably due to resupplying ectoplasmic fluid, I guess?"

Ectoplasmic fluid had the effect of strengthening a Chevalier's physical body and conferring vitality.

The fatigue from staying up all of last night had vanished. Of course, this was also thanks to Hatsune taking a nap on her wyvern mount along the way to Nagoya.

Wyverns were very intelligent creatures and would fly while taking surrounding circumstances into consideration even when their riders were asleep.

...But then again, flying on wyvern was not a smooth ride at all. For people who need a comfortable environment to sleep, a wyvern's back was definitely not a suitable bed.

Battle preparations were complete. Only now did a thought occur to Hatsune. "Onii-sama, all you did was form a tutelary pact without obtaining ectoplasmic fluid, right?"

"That's right."

When soaked in ectoplasmic fluid, Chevaliers were able to "resupply" themselves and their Legions.

Unfortunately, Masatsugu was unable to resupply on his own unless he remembered his name from his past life. His Chevalier Strength was supposed

to be around 1000, but currently, he could only summon a fraction of that.

"Sure enough, it would be a good idea to resupply here... Right?"

"Of course."

"I-I see."

Hatsune fell silent. She had realized what she needed to do and had the intention of going through with it. But due to maidenly feelings of embarrassment, she was fidgeting awkwardly, unable to bring it up— Noticing Hatsune's thoughts and feelings, Masatsugu relaxed his face and smiled.

He got up quietly and walked over to Hatsune, who was sitting in the ectoplasmic fluid.

"Hatsune, if it's okay with you, I'd like to borrow your power. Okay?"

"O-Okay. B-But Onii-sama, I don't like doing it from the front."

Hatsune's tone sounded a little unhappy.

However, with her eyes closed and eyebrows raised, Hatsune's expression was not harsh. Instead, it seemed like she was too embarrassed to look Masatsugu in the eye due to the intense pounding in her chest.

"What do you mean?"

"Th-Think about it, two people hugging each other in the bath, that's too soon for me... I-I want you to touch me from behind instead."

Hatsune's request was filled with embarrassment and innocence.

Masatsugu circled around to the little sister's back and hugged her against his chest.

"Ah—"

Hatsune moaned. She could feel that Masatsugu's body was just as cold as ectoplasmic fluid.

In contrast, her body was boiling hot. The power of the refilled ectoplasmic fluid had warmed her entire body.

"Onii-sama, your body is still ice-cold..."

"Your warmth is all I need."

Hatsune was using her knees and legs to block the front of her body. As a result, Masatsugu could not touch her breasts—in other words, the softest and most maternal parts of the body, but he did not mind.

This maiden whom he called his sworn sister was doing so much for his sake.

This alone felt plenty blissful already. Hatsune was sharing the warmth of her body and soul with him.

"You are so adorable."

"O-Onii-sama, here you go sweet talking again. Mm—mmmmmmmm."

Embraced against Masatsugu's bosom, Hatsune could not help but tremble all over.

Incidentally, after resupplying and Hatsune was drying off with bath towel, she finally learned that "Actually, the ectoplasmic fluid sharing ritual could've waited until you're dressed."

"Then I got taken advantage of!?"

Hatsune screamed in mortification.

Thus, after this interlude with his sister, preparations were complete at last.

Masatsugu was wearing his usual black stiff-collar uniform and Japanese sword, Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada, while Hatsune was dressed in *Haikara-san* style with a pink kimono, hakama, and low boots. The two of them returned to ground level.

A pipe fox was running ahead of them, leading the way. The noetic officers who had come along this expedition from Suruga had imparted the layout of Nagoya Castle to this small retainer beast ahead of time, allowing it to assist the Tachibana siblings who were visiting the castle for the first time.

The two of them arrived at a vast Japanese garden.

"Onii-sama, look!"

One of Rikka's Kamuys was facing off against a British Crusade.

This was a one-on-one duel between Legions both standing roughly eight meters tall. However, the British Legion was a size bigger and this was melee battle, not a shooting match.

The two Legions were using their bayonet rifles—i.e. rifles with a blade fitted on the barrel—and wielding them like "spears."

The Tachibana siblings watched as the Crusade rushed to attack first. Thrusting the bayonet blade consecutively at the Kamuy's body, it was a double thrust.

The Kamuy dodged dexterously.

Next, the Crusade swung the rifle horizontally as though brandishing a massive club.

The Crusade had given up on thrusts, choosing to attack with the rifle's body instead.

The Kamuy was knocked down—Not really.

It had dropped to the ground on its own initiative to dodge the rifle swing. While on the ground, the Japanese blue samurai did not forget to slice sideways.

This severed the Crusade's shin.

Liquid flowed out from the wound. Ectoplasmic fluid was spurting out of the British Legion's leg.

Now it was the Crusade's turn to fall. The Kamuy swiftly got up and stabbed the British Legion in the throat, ending the battle.

"So Crusades can be taken care of just like that, Onii-sama!"

"In theory, yes, but putting it into practice is not that easy."

Hatsune's eyes were glimmering, but Masatsugu had a different opinion.

Using martial arts and agility to win against the strength of British troops was quite an ideal strategy.

To have all Kamuys follow this approach and carry it out without issue, this stood testament to Rikka's outstanding abilities as a commander.

In fact, for the majority of Japanese Chevaliers, even if they issued the same command, their troops would have trouble following through to the very end.

After all, Legions were "giants with their own mind."

If a commander's noesis was too weak, or lacked a concrete image of the required tactics, Legions would move or fight according to "their own judgment."

Winning the melee battle just now in such a splendid manner, Rikka's army was impressive as always.

However, in the next instant...

The victorious Kamuy was struck in the back by a descending flash of light, blowing it away.

A new Crusade had arrived. The approaching British Legion fired with its rifle, killing the Kamuy in front of the Tachibana siblings.

Another Kamuy flying at low speed nearby rushed against the new Crusade.

This Kamuy happened to be searching for enemies. It sped up all at once, circled around to the Crusade's back and stabbed—But unfortunately, things did not go as planned.

The Kamuy's attack speed was insufficient.

This ambush from the air was a bit sluggish. The targeted Crusade shot back before the Kamuy's attack could connect, piercing the Kamuy's head and mask.

Rikka's army had set off from Suruga, spending several hours to cross the Southern Alps to reach Nagoya.

The exhaustion from this long journey had deprived the Kamuys of their speed.

"The Kamuys are reaching their limit. Let's summon our Legions."

"Yeah. Upon my Appellation of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune, assemble, my Legions!"

"Gather, Kanesadas."

Masatsugu and Hatsune called for their own Legions, using their own

contrasting styles of summoning.

The "Kanesada" was the Kamuy variant equipped with red-purple armor. The "Kurou Hougan" was the Kamuy variant in red armor and a white garment with an elongated helmet resembling an *eboshi*, a type of headgear worn by court nobles in the past.

Overhead, forty Kanesadas and thirty Kurou Hougans had manifested.

Hatsune's Chevalier Strength was 72. She had lost few Legions in the battle last night and actually could have summoned more than these thirty.

"Everybody ready? I'm going to ask you to fight bravely!"

"Indeed, your job is to defend this castle to the death."

This was a very merciless order, but neither Masatsugu nor Hatsune expressed any sense of martyrdom.

Masatsugu's expression was aloof as always while Hatsune grinned—Like a child about to play a prank.

"By the way, Onii-sama, don't forget Rikka-sama's request."

"Oh, you mean *that*. I don't really think it's necessary to use that Feat of Arms here... But whatever. Kanesadas, draw your swords."

Masatsugu was reminded by the little sister.

Rikka had told him it was imperative to use Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada's Feat of Arms when fighting inside the castle.

Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada was the Japanese sword used by Hijikata Toshizō, a samurai of the Bakumatsu era. Its Appellation granted identical katanas and Shinsengumi swordsmanship to the Legions commanded by its inheritor.

At Masatsugu's command, the forty Kanesadas transformed their bayonet rifles into Japanese swords.

"So they have arrived?"

Riding a wyvern, Rikka was flying slowly near the central keep.

This was to get an overhead view of the battle taking place in Nagoya Castle.

She saw the arrival of allies, the Kanesada and Kurou Hougan variants of the Kamuy. Seventy of them had materialized in the air over the Japanese garden.

"Their help comes at a welcome moment. My Legions are nearing their limit."

The Kamuys brought from Suruga continued to show great fortitude, but could not hide their growing fatigue. Fighting against the Crusades invading the castle, Rikka's Kamuys were losing the original dexterity in their movements.

One after another, the Kamuys died in action.

Attacked by the Restoration Alliance from outside, the noesis barrier guarding Nagoya Castle was also about to collapse. Cracks were showing all over the place.

The Crusades and the Kinai Kamuys kept invading from the cracks.

However, enemies were not the only ones coming to the castle.

The Tōkaidō provincial army's Kamuys were also gathering in Nagoya Castle successively.

Entering the castle through the cracks used by the Restoration Alliance, they shot or slashed enemies, killing them on sight.

Among them were a few Chevaliers on wyvern mounts.

They were all Rikka's colleagues and Tōkaidō Chevaliers well-acquainted with her.

"Vibes are coming together of making a last stand to the bitter end. So this what they call 'Living and dying with the castle.'"

Rikka smiled fearlessly.

Locked in a chaotic struggle, both friend and foe had gathered at Nagoya Castle.

The conditions favoring their plan were gradually ripening. This was the plan that Tachibana Masatsugu had put forth and carried out by Akigase Rikka with minor adjustments.

"Now the last piece of the puzzle is my father's consent..."

Akigase Rikka was not the Tōkaidō provincial army's commander-in-chief.

That was her father's office. Rikka did not have the authority to command the Nagoya castellan and the Chevaliers who had gathered here.

What she had done earlier was an act of grandstanding as the premier Chevalier and the *Governor General's daughter*.

The next phase required her father's approval so as to issue new orders to the Chevaliers to be carried out swiftly.

For this purpose, Rikka had brought a team of noetic officers along with her army in addition to the Tachibana siblings.

The noetic officers' first priority was to inform her father of the detailed battle plan. After obtaining his approval, they would then contact all the Tōkaidō Chevaliers scattered across the battlefield.

How was the situation going to unfold next?

"My father should be well aware that dying in a last stand at Nagoya would be meaningless... I just hope this is not wishful thinking on my part as his daughter."

Instantly, a pipe fox teleported to Rikka's shoulder.

The messenger retainer beast projected the information into the air. It was sent by the Suruga noetic officers.

Rikka chuckled. Preparations were evidently complete.

She transmitted noesis to every Kamuy fighting relentlessly in the castle.

"Good work, all of you. Please try your best to engage and hinder the invading Legions of the Restoration Alliance."

Rikka was asking them to fight in the castle until death.

The crux of the plan depended on using *the Tōkaidō Legions summoned to the castle, as well as the entire Nagoya Castle itself, as bait*. Rikka tugged on her wyvern's reins, ordering it to head to a new destination.

She was going to the central keep's entrance.

According to the original plan, it was where she was to converge with her father, the Tachibana siblings, and others.

The objective was to retreat from Nagoya Castle with minimum sacrifice.

Part 4

During this offensive launched by the Restoration Alliance against Nagoya...

Superficially, a Chevalier from the Kinai Fiefdom held the position of "supreme commander."

But actually, this commander had neither the authority nor the ability to direct British forces. And there were a total of six Knights of Her Majesty participating in this operation.

The one leading these six knights was Sir David.

He belonged to the Far East Fleet of the British Imperial Forces. Prior to the arrival of Edward the Black Prince, Sir David was the top knight among his peers.

Only thirty-two years old, this young knight had short blond hair.

His Chevalier Strength was 167, which was extremely outstanding for a modern soldier who was not a Resurrectee.

"Are the Tōkaidō samurai planning to hole up in their castle?" David muttered.

Riding a British white wyvern, he was flying slowly in the city.

He was currently over a baseball field. Nagoya Castle was four or five kilometers to the west. Japanese and British Legions alike were rushing to the castle, turning it into the center of a chaotic battle.

"The Tōkaidō Kamuys seem to have suddenly lost a large fraction of their numbers."

Through noetic waves, Chevaliers were capable of sensing total numbers of Legions instantaneously.

Both the Kinai and Tōkaidō fiefdoms used Kamuys, but no Chevalier would

ever mix up any Legion's allegiance.

Coincidentally, Sir Cole, a fellow Knight of Her Majesty was flying close by.

"Perhaps they're conserving their forces, preparing to fight a long war of attrition against us, David?" This colleague shared the question on his mind after hearing his leader's mutters.

Cole was only twenty-three years old, an inexperienced Knight of Her Majesty. These newcomers would occasionally leave Britain or Europe to areas such as the Far East in search of battlefields. This allowed them to fight freely without nagging from "the old folk."

"De-materializing Legions that are not in combat does reduce a Chevalier's burden."

"Perhaps they are hoping for reinforcements from Tōsandō or Kantō," Sir David smiled wryly with pity. "With the secret agreement between Tōsandō and us, they're virtually our people already. As for the Kantō Fiefdom... Their forces will never make it in time. The sun is about to set."

The setting sun's rays were dyeing Nagoya's cityscape orange.

David delivered bold words amid the colors of dusk. "Nagoya Castle will definitely fall to us before the sun rises again tomorrow morning. Cole, I'm looking forward to your contributions."

If Tachibana Masatsugu were present to witness this scene...

He would probably nod lightly and secretly celebrate the success of "the risky first phase."

In Akigase Rikka's case, she would probably clench her fist and express her joy with a pose filled with fighting spirit and youthful fervor.

The *preconceptions* of the Knights of Her Majesty had aided Masatsugu and his group.

These knights believed that the loyal and brave Japanese samurai had prepared themselves "to die for their cause." One would not fault them for their complacency. After all, they had yet to taste defeat since landing in Japan.

Hence, the battle-hardened Knights of Her Majesty were already blinded by

their bias. They were convinced that the strengths and weaknesses of Japanese Chevaliers could all be attributed to their excessively rigid samurai spirit—

Part 5

Rikka's army had deliberately charged into the battlefield in an ostentatious manner.

Roaring, her Legions had called upon her Tōkaidō comrades to follow her and gather in the castle for a last stand to defend Nagoya Castle.

In the meantime, the noetic officers from Suruga were in charge of preparations.

They rushed over to the Tōkaidō Governor General and secured authorization to proceed with the plan. After that, they sent out pipe foxes to notify the ten-odd Chevaliers scattered throughout the castle or the city.

In other words...

'Calling all Chevaliers, leave your Kamuys on the battlefield while doing your utmost to return to Nagoya Castle. Thirty minutes from now, all units shall retreat from the castle together with His Excellency the Governor General.'

'Chevaliers unable to return to the castle shall escape Nagoya at your own discretion. Converge at the Suruga tutelary fort.'

'There is no need to defend Nagoya Castle with your life. The key to Tōkaidō's continued existence depends on future battles.'

The above was the content of the message.

The message was jointly signed by "Akigase Shouzan and Hijikata" as the ones issuing the orders.

Twelve Chevaliers returned to Nagoya Castle and the group began to retreat.

"When penetrating enemy territory, know locations to avoid and identify poorly guarded lines of retreat to ensure certain escape. Charge the enemy, break

their formation, take no prisoners... Behold my Feat of Arms—Kotouhisshutsu!"

The Tachibana little sister was the one in charge of creating the opening to retreat.

In front of Nagoya Castle's central keep, Hatsune summoned five Kurou Hougans. She recited the mantra loudly and invoked the Feat of Arms—Kotouhisshutsu.

Leading the Legions under her command, the Tachibana little sister marched forward confidently.

Masatsugu was following right behind her, accompanied by Akigase Rikka, Rikka's father Akigase Shouzan, a few of Shouzan's trusted subordinates, and the team of noetic officers from Suruga.

Finally, rounding out the total were ten Tōkaidō Chevaliers.

Fujinomiya Shiori had said previously, "Can achieve instantaneous movement so long as the distance is not too great—A type of teleportation power. Perhaps it is a reenactment of the legends of the Hyodori-goe surprise assault and jumping over eight ships."

This was an explanation of the Feat of Arms—Kotouhisshutsu's power.

The Feat of Arms instantly transported everyone from Nagoya Castle to ten-odd kilometers to the northeast.

It was not a huge distance, but Japan was a nation of mountains. These ten-odd kilometers could take them to favorable terrain.

On this occasion, the group had moved to the mountainous area upstream of the Shounai River.

Escaping the intense siege, the group had arrived at a stream with pure and clean water.

Masatsugu and company were standing on the shore that was covered in gravel. They were going to sneak through the mountains, so Hatsune dismissed her five Legions.

This crazy method of movement easily rivaled Minamoto no Yoshitsune's famous legend of Hyodori-goe.

The first time he heard that story, Masatsugu had the following thoughts. Even if horses and deer were both quadrupedal creatures, how could horses traverse mountain paths used by deer exclusively? Totally ridiculous.

In any case, their retreat operation had begun.

The noetic officers summoned twenty or so retainer beasts, the Mibu wolves.

They were giant wolves with silver fur and the size of purebred racehorses. Carrying one or two people each, they raced over mountain paths.

Their destination was Suruga, more than a hundred kilometers away. Furthermore, the sky was growing dark.

Normally, it was impossible to run in the mountains under such conditions. Fortunately, the Mibu wolves had excellent night vision and sense of smell, paired with extraordinary endurance and leg strength.

With noetic officers guiding them forward using noetic control, the wolves did not have any trouble for now.

After the wolves started running, Rikka had her Mibu wolf catch up to Masatsugu's mount and run side by side with his.

"Masatsugu-dono, may I have a moment of your time?" Rikka struck up conversation with Masatsugu. "Frankly speaking, I believe that the retreat operation from Nagoya has gone relatively smoothly."

"Indeed, Hatsune's Feat of Arms—or rather, Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune's Feat of Arms—is astoundingly powerful. It's possible that the Restoration Alliance is still unaware that we have retreated."

The one who deserved the most credit in this battle was currently sitting in front of Masatsugu, riding the same wolf.

Usage of Kotouhisshutsu was very draining. Unbelievably, Hatsune was able to nod off to sleep while riding a wolf's back.

Masatsugu had his little sister leaning against his chest. He lowered his voice and said, "Were Richard present, this would've been a crazy gamble to avoid."

"I agree, it's just that..." Rikka smiled and sneaked a glance at Masatsugu. "When you devised our current strategem, Masatsugu-dono, you took this

point into consideration, didn't you?"

"....."

"Last night, the Lionheart's one thousand Legions perished in battle at Suruga. It would take at last ten days or half a month for them to fully revive, which means he should be behaving these few days."

"If that man had been present at Nagoya, the castle might've fallen before we could hurry to the scene." Masatsugu shrugged and replied, "When we summoned the troops and knights to gather at the castle, it would've been possible for him to notice our intention to retreat. In any case, defeating him last night was definitely a good thing."

"Yes, which is why we dared to take a gamble." Rikka nodded in agreement.

Smart and brave—Rare and valuable were generals blessed with both intelligence and valor. Akigase Rikka was evidently one of them.

Without needing Masatsugu to spell everything out, she was able to read between the lines.

"The true challenge lay with my colleagues... How to quickly convince the Tōkaidō Chevaliers and lead them to escape, *that* was the key."

Listening to Rikka, Masatsugu finally understood her intent. "No wonder you used the name of Hijikata."

"Yes, I borrowed the princess' wisdom. After all, I was taken in by the same trick too."

"Personally, Rikka-dono, I feel that your own reputation alone is already enough."

"I am not that popular. People only think of me as the Governor General's unworthy daughter, stubborn and lacking in feminine charm."

"You're too modest."

Masatsugu and Rikka's Mibu wolves were currently running at the head of the pack.

The five Mibu wolves behind were carrying ten Tōkaidō Chevaliers between

them. Oddly enough, these Chevaliers were staring at Masatsugu's back with eyes of fervor...

Rikka smirked. "It was worth it for you to use Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada at Nagoya Castle. Everyone is wondering whether you are Hijikata Toshizō—or rather, they are hoping for you to be Hijikata Toshizō."

"Hoping?"

"The British have Edward the Black Prince and King Richard the Lionheart. Then Japan ought to have its own hero step forward... This hope is far stronger than you can imagine. Furthermore, the Mibu wolves we are riding..." Rikka touched the silver fur of the running wolf and said, "Did you know? Hijikata Toshizō-dono used to lead a pack of Mibu wolves to fight on various battlefields across eastern Japan to protect the northern court at Hokkaidō from the Meiji government's attacks."

"I've heard bits and pieces of that."

"Stuck with inferior numbers and equipment, Hijikata-dono had no choice but to avoid pitched battles. Instead, he relied on the Mibu wolves to fight on the run. Using guerrilla tactics similar to those of bandits, he made fools out of the government's armed forces."

"Oh?"

"After battles, he often rode a Mibu wolf to retreat."

"...I see."

In a certain way, this retreat operation was a reenactment of Hijikata Toshizō's legend too.

Perhaps this was why the Tōkaidō Chevaliers were willing to accept the retreat operation. Otherwise, they were all determined to "die for their cause" in the beginning.

Now, Masatsugu finally understood where Rikka's worries were coming from.

In fact, prior to setting off, Akigase Rikka and her father had engaged in a similar debate.

Currently, the old man who was Tōkaidō's Governor General was fast asleep

—or rather, unconscious. He had suffered heavy injuries during the battle at Nagoya Castle.

His wounds included bruises all over his body, external injuries to the head, sprains to the neck vertebrae, broken ribs, *etc.*

Currently, the Governor General was being transported by tying him to the back of a Mibu wolf.

In any case, he had to be delivered to Suruga first before they could talk about treatment and recuperation.

Akigase Shouzan had only received minimal first aid. Until just before setting off, he had remained conscious. As soon as he saw his beloved daughter, the two of them had started arguing.

'Your strategy is correct. Dying in a last stand at Nagoya would be meaningless. However, I would rather die than retreat.'

Just before escaping Nagoya Castle, everyone had gathered in front of the central keep.

Lying on a stretcher, Rikka's father made his determination clear.

As the Governor General, he could not leave behind the city's residents and escape on his own. He was going to stay behind to fulfill a lord's duties.

In contrast, the daughter gave him no respect for it.

'I am worried that the enemy will use you as a hostage or a bargaining chip in negotiations if you were to be captured. Either way, since you happen to be injured, I will transport you to Suruga in your current state.'

'Damn you!'

'My esteemed father, didn't you make the same decision? Where are my younger brothers?'

'Oh right, Rikka-sama.' Hatsune had asked without thinking. 'You have two younger brothers, right?'

'Yes, they were sent away soon after war broke out between the Restoration Alliance and us. My father knew that Nagoya would turn into a battlefield

sooner or later.'

'Hmph, if the ruler's children are rendered captives,' Akigase Shouzan spoke with disdain, 'the retainers will begin to have unnecessary worries. To be perfectly honest, I wanted to order them to commit suicide if and when the castle falls, to live and die with Nagoya.'

'Had you actually given that order to your sons, history would have deemed you an anachronistic tyrant.' Rikka did not hold back her criticisms. 'Nowadays, domestic and foreign media will harshly condemn rulers who issue unreasonable commands to their retainers or children.'

'Stating the obvious. That is why I had to take precautions.'

'Then the same will be done for you who are injured.'

'.....'

'Traveling to Suruga with your injuries will be quite an ordeal. Consider this a lesson and endure the pain.'

Viewed on a certain level, this kind of upfront conversation could not have happened except between this particular pair of father and daughter.

In the end, Tōkaidō Governor General Akigase Shouzan fainted during the bumpy ride on the wolf's back, turning him into silent luggage.

However, there were those who disagreed with the retreat operation.

Nagoya's castellan and two elderly Chevaliers had decided to stay, insisting someone needed to take responsibility for the civilians and the enemy armies.

In any case, Masatsugu's faction had now gained ten new Chevaliers.

Simply having a headcount would be meaningless. The whole point of taking the expedition to Nagoya from Suruga was to make effective use of their combat power.

"Masatsugu-dono, it is about time. Let us ride wyverns instead of Mibu wolves."

Masatsugu agreed with Rikka's suggestion.

They asked the noetic officers to summon wyverns then switched to flying.

For the time being, they would follow the mountain ridge and fly at low altitude, the same as what they had done during the journey to Nagoya. The plan was to instantly increase elevation once they neared Suruga to head to the tutelary fort.

This was a stealth operation, but time was of the essence.

Tonight's operation was not over. More plans lay ahead.

"Rikka-dono, take this chance while they're switching to wyverns to tell the other knights about *that*—"

"Very well, I shall explain. Then let us wake my father. I need his consent for the battle plan. If he is in delirium, I will need him to appoint me as the acting Governor General at least."

At a glance, Akigase Shouzan seemed to be a strict father.

However, his beloved daughter was also a strong-willed woman who was strict with her father too. One might say 'Like father, like daughter.' Perhaps this father and daughter pair were quite alike in personality.

A wry smile surfaced on Masatsugu's face while he watched their amusing interactions.

To the eyes of others, his smile would probably be nothing more than a slight twitch on the corner of his mouth—

Chapter 2 - To the East and to the West

Part 1

November 8th, 0:00.

It was midnight right when the date rolled over.

Princess Shiori had gone to visit an old acquaintance.

"Our last meeting was..."

"August this year—Yes. It happened to correspond to the time when Your Highness returned from the Roman imperial capital."

"Yes, and you happened to be staying in Tokyo at the time, Akigase-sama."

This conversation was taking place at a special sickroom at the Suruga tutelary fort's medical division.

Eighteen hours earlier, Shiori had been lying on this same bed. Supplying ectoplasmic fluid for Tachibana Masatsugu for consecutive days, she had collapsed from exhaustion.

Now, her bed was being used by someone else.

Akigase Shouzan, Governor General of the Tōkaidō Fiefdom. He was Rikka's father and according to reports, he had been heavily injured at Nagoya Castle eight hours earlier.

"It is far too shameful for me to meet Your Highness in such a manner."

"Both victory and defeat are commonplace in war and injuries are often inevitable. I believe there is no shame in this." Shiori politely offered words of

consolation, then changed her expression.

She smiled fearlessly and revealed the acuity of her intellect.

"It is impossible for a single fiefdom of Japan to stand against the British Empire. Any Governor General would have met the same outcome had they been in your place, Akigase-sama."

The elderly Governor General was on the bed, only managing to prop up his upper body.

He narrowed his eyes for a moment to scrutinize Shiori then smiled wryly.

"I almost thought your personality changed all of a sudden... But it turns out you had simply discarded your facade."

"Oh dear, please call it 'treating others with sincerity' instead."

Akigase Shouzan was a powerful politician and highly experienced as a judge of character.

Shiori had offered honest words to some degree, hoping to bring each other closer.

This was not to cultivate personal friendship. For a princess seeking ascension and a fiefdom's Governor General, this was simply part of their job.

"Strictly speaking, Akigase-sama, you are only to blame for one mistake."

"Waiting in vain for aid from Tōsandō and Kantō until the very end... I suppose that should be it."

"Indeed, you should have requested Eastern Rome's aid instead."

After hearing this, the elderly Governor General's wry expression lost its smile.

With a bitter face, he said, "Eastern Rome is Japan's ally, indeed, but one cannot consider them a friendly nation after all. Recklessly inviting a great army from Rome would very likely turn Tōkaidō into their dog, which was why I hoped for my compatriots in eastern Japan to extend a helping hand. All things considered, we are fellow citizens of Imperial Japan—"

"Certainly, it would be ideal to prevent Rome's participation in this situation."

Shiori nodded in agreement. "The Restoration Alliance are aided by Edward the Black Prince and Richard the Lionheart, which necessitates Lord Caesar's active participation to oppose them. The problem here is that allowing Lord Caesar to join the battle would effectively make him the commander of the 'Anti-Restoration Alliance' forces—"

"Regardless of the Restoration Alliance's success or failure, Tōkaidō would end up owing him an excessively large favor."

Imperial Japan was divided into twelve provinces, ruled by the Twelve Houses as regional feudal lords. The relationship between the Japanese Empress and the houses was analogous to that "between the shogun and the various feudal clans of the Edo period."

Among the twelve, the Kantō Fiefdom held the most special position.

While serving as the protector of the imperial capital of Tokyo and the current Empress, they were also extremely wealthy economically.

And the one had Empress Teruhime and the higher-ups of the Kantō Fiefdom secretly "feeding from his hand" was none other than Generalissimo Caesar of the neighboring Eastern Roman Empire.

Akigase Shouzan had vowed to never repeat the same error as the Kantō Fiefdom.

However, the elderly Governor General now sighed in anguish.

"Lord Caesar is starting to intervene in the war, yet Japan has no one capable of relegating him to a supporting role... It would appear that Tōkaidō's futile struggle ends here."

"No, it would be impossible to relegate Lord Caesar to a supporting role."

This old man was powerful but he was not a hero of timeless transcendence.

His house and territory had fallen into an unprecedented crisis.

It was time for Shiori to deliver her feature presentation to him. Currently, there was no one in Japan in greater need of Lord Tenryuu's granddaughter and a powerful Resurrectee than him.

Shiori smiled with full confidence.

"However, as for relegating him to second billing... I do believe that such a casting would be feasible."

"Oh? Speaking of which," the Tōkaidō Governor General looked sharply at Shiori. "Lately, a familiar name has frequently come to my ears."

"Please allow me to offer a proposal, which covers this matter too. It concerns the future of the Tōkaidō Fiefdom now that it has lost Nagoya and met defeat at the hands of the Restoration Alliance..."

This was one item on the agenda during the war council this morning.

After the Roman military's Staff Officer Yang had relayed Generalissimo Caesar's intent, Shiori had devised "the next step in the plan." Rikka and Tachibana Masatsugu had agreed as well, which amounted to consensus on the Suruga side.

"How about abandoning Nagoya for the time being to pursue opportunities in the *east*?"

"East... So 'Hakone Checkpoint' is what you are referring to?"

"Yes. The Tōkaidō Fiefdom will first make Suruga its temporary provincial capital then take back Hakone from Edward the Black Prince."

"Take back?"

"Indeed. This is also the purpose for which we are relying on your Chevaliers to head out to battle *tonight*."

Hakone Checkpoint was an impregnable fortress. Furthermore, it was Black Prince Edward's stronghold.

Currently, the defenses at Hakone Checkpoint were far more secure than even Nagoya Castle. Akigase Shouzan widened his eyes, very surprised by the suggestion.

Part 2

November 8th, 00:35.

It was late night after the date had rolled over.

Headed by Tachibana Masatsugu, the Tōkaidō Chevaliers were out in the field, too busy to take a break yet.

They were headed for the regional city facing Suruga Bay—Fuji City.

This was one of the towns conquered by the Restoration Alliance a month earlier.

"I remember it was roughly ten days ago when we came here with the princess, right?"

"Yes, though last time was on the level of sneaking into someone's back yard..."

This conversation between the Tachibana siblings was taking place on a wyvern.

As the rider in charge, Masatsugu held the reins while little sister Hatsune rode behind him. Masatsugu gazed down at Fuji City's port of Tagonoura and said, "Our objective this time is to conquer this land. Let's check out what we're up against."

The Fuji tutelary fort was built as a star fort located four or five kilometers east of Tagonoura Port.

Presently, there were 242 Kamuys approaching the tutelary fort.

These 242 Legions belonged to the Tōkaidō army that Masatsugu had taken from the Suruga tutelary fort.

However, this army was composed of Kamuys, not the red-purple "Kanesadas" summoned by the amnesiac Resurrectee.

"Will the Nagoya knights be okay?" Hatsune asked in worry. "They're probably very tired. They've been fighting since daytime, then crossing mountains to escape to Suruga, and now they're on another expedition after almost no rest."

Masatsugu had decided to leave this attack on Fuji to his *comrades*.

He had rescued ten Chevaliers from Nagoya Castle. Their names were Tana, Kamaru, Kusudou, Rio, Toraga, Sudo, Ikou, Bizen, Ayase, and Benke.

Their total Chevalier Strength was six hundred or so.

After the battle at Nagoya Castle, the majority of their Legions were dead or injured.

Fortunately, they still had 242 Kamuys in reserve when they retreated last evening. These forces were now deployed in full for retaking Fuji.

Setting off from the Suruga tutelary fort, they secretly marched underwater through Suruga Bay— Then flying along Fuji City's coast, they launched a surprise attack on the Fuji tutelary fort.

"Relay orders to the noetic special ops team. It's our turn to use noetic disruption."

Masatsugu whispered from his saddle.

As the commander of the operation, he was observing from the back together with his little sister.

"Wireless communications and airwaves are no longer usable in Fuji City. Preparations for a surprise assault are almost in place. The rest is up to the Nagoya Chevaliers."

"The Kurou Hougans I brought could help out too..."

"No need. Wait here quietly."

"Understood~ ...Ooh, it's so nerve-racking to watch a battle from the sidelines."

Seventy Kurou Hougans were lurking in the sea as a reserve force.

Meanwhile, the 242 Nagoya Kamuys were advancing through the air in a spherical formation.

As the army approached the Fuji tutelary fort, they raised their rifles to fire in volleys. The enemy deployed a dome-shaped noesis barrier, completely enveloping the star-shaped fortress.

The Tōkaidō army's volley fire was blocked completely by the noesis barrier.

A gigantic eyeball also appeared in the sky over the tutelary fort.

With a diameter of sixty meters or so, it was "the eye of the death goddess."

"Onii-sama, look. It's that eyeball monster we encountered last time!"

"I think the ifrit is called Morgan le Fay... Probably an avatar."

The divinity's principal image was set up at Hakone.

However, Morgan le Fay's avatar was as powerful as an ordinary ifrit. Such was the astounding power wielded by the strongest guardian deity of the British Imperial Forces.

Around the giant eyeball was a defense force of 146 Crusades...

Hatsune was so nervous that she almost gasped.

"W-Which side has the upper hand!?"

The Tōkaidō army on the attacking side had 242 Legions. Numerical superiority was on their side, but after fighting intensely throughout the day, they were quite exhausted.

Against the enemy's noesis barrier, the Kamuy army changed formation.

They formed a "rectangular wall." The roughly two hundred and forty Kamuys arranged themselves into a rectangular prism—in other words, a "wall" eight Legions wide, five Legions tall, and six Legions deep.

The Tōkaidō army advanced as a wall, meanwhile continuing to fire.

They charged straight at the tutelary fort's noesis barrier.

The Restoration Alliance on the defending side first had the ifrit Morgan le Fay summon thunderclouds in the night sky. This was a mysterious power that controlled weather phenomena—The meteorological decree.

Blotting out the moon and the stars, the thunderclouds kept raining down

lightning strikes.

Oddly enough, instead of targeting the Tōkaidō army's "wall in the air," the lightning struck Morgan le Fay's giant eyeball avatar.

The Tōkaidō army pressed forward, finally arriving at the tutelary fort's noesis barrier.

The dense wall of Legions versus the dome-shaped wall of noetic energy—
The two giant walls clashed directly.

Of the 242 Kamuys in the wall formation, the forty on the front face, *i.e.* 8 x 5, raised their bayonets to stab the noesis barrier before them.

Instantly, the barrier shook violently.

At the same time, a girl's adorable voice resounded throughout the night sky.

'Meteorological decree, activate. Shining spear... Receive the blessing of the death goddess.'

Masatsugu had recollections of this voice. It was the genie controlling Morgan le Fay.

Next, the giant eyeball in the sky released a powerful flash of lightning.

The eyeball had concentrated the previously absorbed lightning strikes into one intense attack—towards the Tōkaidō's 242 Legions.

The "wall in the sky" of 242 Kamuys shook violently.

Casualties for Legions on the outer surface of the wall were particularly severe.

Some of the Kamuys were scorched all over while others were blown back. Still others dropped their rifles or staggered unsteadily, etc...

There were also Kamuys that lost consciousness and crashed to the ground.

The British side took advantage of the chaos to attack.

146 Crusades had been waiting ready behind the giant eyeball in the air. Forty of them charged the right side of the "wall in the sky."

They were targeting the outer surface of the wall formation—in other words,

the more seriously damaged Kamuys.

Confronted with this sudden assault, many of the Kamuys in the Tōkaidō army were caught unprepared and were stabbed in various vitals such as the throat, the chest, or the head.

The Crusades did not enter any formation.

Attacking swiftly with their blades, they sliced through the densely packed Kamuys.

Close to twenty of the small blue Legions died and crashed down.

After the quick assault, the Crusades rapidly retreated back to beside Morgan le Fay's giant eyeball...

Once again, the giant eyeball absorbed powerful electricity from the sky.

The enemy was planning to repeat the same offensive. Masatsugu's cheek twitched in a smile.

"I see, so this is what they're thinking."

"Onii-sama, did you figure out something?"

"Yes, our victory is assured."

"H-How so?"

"Hatsune, send a pipe fox to inform all Chevaliers in battle. The message is as follows: 'All units, keep going as-is and fight.'"

"Maintain the status quo? You're not offering strategies to handle the electrical attacks or directions to scatter and fight back!?"

"The way I see it, no need for that." Masatsugu declared firmly and explained to the surprised Hatsune.

"The enemy will not last."

Thirty minutes passed.

Morgan le Fay's eyeball repeated the same lightning attack ten times.

The Crusades also raided ten times in concert.

After every combo attack, the Tōkaidō army suffered significant damage... But currently, the battle was in favor of the samurai of Imperial Japan.

The "wall in the sky" formed from Kamuys remained intact.

Seizing opportunities to attack, the Tōkaidō army opened fire to unleash potent firepower.

The British Legions and the tutelary fort ahead had no choice but to take on this simple yet powerful attack.

The British side's noesis barrier was all riddled with countless holes and cracks, about to collapse. The defending Crusades were also down to about fifty...

"They're really going to win easily at this rate. Looks like the Nagoya knights still have enough energy to last the whole battle, despite fighting nonstop during the daytime. Their stamina is too amazing."

"Did you forget, Hatsune?" Masatsugu reminded the impressed Hatsune.

They were still riding one wyvern together. In the end, neither of them went up to the front line personally. There was no need to mobilize Hatsune's army either.

"Prior to setting off, the Nagoya Chevaliers established their tutelary pacts at Suruga and finished resupplying on ectoplasmic fluid. Doing this is enough to recover a Chevalier's stamina."

"Oh right."

Hatsune had experienced the same thing at Nagoya Castle so she immediately figured it out.

Their wyvern slowly flew towards the Fuji tutelary fort.

"Besides, the Nagoya Chevaliers are fueled by more than energy alone."

"What else is there?"

"Rage."

Masatsugu explained the battle situation while controlling the wyvern.

"They suffered a great defeat at Nagoya Castle without getting a chance to go

all-out. If you give them a chance to fight after the fact, it's like dangling a carrot in front of a horse's nose. Their fighting spirit will be high, of course."

"Definitely, this could be considered a battle to regain their honor..."

"Compared to the Restoration Alliance at Fuji, the Tōkaidō side has superior numbers and morale. Even if the enemy play little tricks in this kind of situation, they still won't be able to dislodge our side's advantage."

"So that's why you told them to keep going as-is, Onii-sama!"

"Well, there was no way to issue any other order," said Masatsugu indifferently. "The Nagoya Chevaliers are too worked up. Besides, this army was assembled from ten Chevaliers in a hurry. They won't be able to properly carry out any command other than 'charge'."

"Your comment is a bit too direct here..."

"No matter how obedient Legions are, knights and generals are usually people with strong egos."

"But you're so amazing, Onii-sama. The battle really turned out as you predicted."

Hatsune praised Masatsugu with glimmering eyes.

After taking care of Richard the Lionheart, Masatsugu had said during the war council that 'Since Nagoya is going to fall anyway, we should set things up properly for today. We just might be able to retake Fuji City.'

Hence, their primary purpose in taking an expedition to Nagoya was not to support a retreat.

Instead, they were gathering up the scattered Chevaliers after their defeat so as to deploy them in the battle to recapture Fuji on the same day.

Indeed, they were starting a battle the same night as the Nagoya defeat.

This was the moment when the enemy would be the most complacent. Furthermore, Masatsugu was taking advantage of the fact that after Richard's defeat, the British were unable to fully compensate for the forces deployed in the Nagoya invasion.

"It's all thanks to defeating Richard yesterday." Masatsugu muttered.
"Without that victory, the expedition to Nagoya would've been a dangerous gamble. The attack on Fuji might've been very difficult too."

"Oh right, Onii-sama, you said something weird a while ago."

Hatsune recalled the conversation from thirty minutes earlier.

"You saw through the British army's plan and even said 'So this is what they're thinking,' didn't you?"

"Seeing as the enemy did not choose the simplest and wisest course of action, I guessed that they had probably thought up some kind of smart-ass idea."

"What smart-ass idea?"

"Figure it out yourself. We'll compare notes later."

"I can't believe you won't tell me, that's so mean!"

"I'm not toying with you on purpose. We're going to be busy next."

"Like rushing into the Fuji tutelary fort?"

"That's one of the reasons, but I expect Hakone to send reinforcements soon. We need to come up with a solution."

"Just intercept them here!"

"No, fighting should be avoided if possible. I wish to enter a dialogue."

"...Dialogue?"

Hatsune tilted her head in puzzlement, unable to understand her older brother's words.

Her intelligence was still an unknown, but her instincts were very sharp and her wits were unexpectedly quick too. Soon enough, she would probably understand without needing detailed explanations.

Flying on the same wyvern mount, the two of them gazed upon Fuji City's night scenery and Suruga Bay below.

The tutelary fort was just ahead. Reflecting light from the moon and the stars, the night ocean's surface was filled with a fantastical atmosphere.

Part 3

A battle between the Tōkaidō army and the Restoration Alliance had broken out at the Fuji tutelary fort.

Just as victory was about to be decided, the genie Morrigan also began to retreat. Naturally, this so-called retreat did not refer to physical movement.

She summoned her consciousness back from the simulacrum stationed there as her avatar.

The spirit Morrigan's principal image was located at the impregnable fortress, Hakone Checkpoint.

Fuji City was thirty kilometers away from Hakone. After spending twenty minutes, Morrigan's consciousness finally returned.

"...What an, embarrassment."

As soon as Morrigan returned to her usual simulacrum, she could not help but grumble about the humiliation of defeat.

The intricate doll stood 150cm tall and looked like a living girl. Morrigan was sitting in a rocking chair, dressed in a sailor outfit with a beret.

"I am terribly, sorry. The Fuji tutelary fort's defense... was a failure."

"You have no need to apologize, Morrigan."

The man commonly referred to as prince replied gently.

Edward the Black Prince.

The ultimate military genius born to the English royal family in the medieval age, he was also the commander-in-chief of the British Imperial Forces stationed in Imperial Japan.

"Your role is nothing more than a castle's guardian goddess. Humans are the ones responsible for human accomplishments and failures . Responsibility for

the defeat lies with Defoe and Chamberlain—the Chevaliers on the field who were commanding Legions and giving you directions."

Edward and Morrigan were currently at Hakone.

The location was a military facility near Komagadake, inside a room in the command center.

Back when this land was under the Kantō Fiefdom's control, the room was the office used by the "supreme commander of the Hakone tutelary fort." Now, it belonged to Britain and Edward the Black Prince.

The divinity baseplate of Morrigan's principal image Morgan le Fay was also housed in the command center.

Until a few dozen minutes ago, she was still possessing her avatar at the Fuji tutelary fort and participating in the defensive battle. Never did she expect failure as the outcome—Morrigan was gnashing her teeth in chagrin.

The "prince" said to her, "Knowing you, Morrigan, I am certain you warned them prior to the battle. 'Against a numerically superior enemy, it would be wise to refrain from attacking recklessly. Focus on defense together with Morgan le Fay and wait for reinforcements from Hakone.' Right?"

"Precisely."

"However, Defoe and Chamberlain ignored your counsel."

"....."

"Since Uncle could not participate in the Nagoya invasion, we had no choice but to send experienced Chevaliers from areas adjacent to Hakone, which includes Fuji City. Taking over defense duty on their behalf, Defoe and Chamberlain are both young and inexperienced Chevaliers."

Edward closed his eyes and deduced what had transpired.

"With Chevalier Strengths around 70, ineligible as Knights of Her Majesty, they are impatient to distinguish themselves on the battlefield. Coincidentally, an army from Suruga attacked... Hence, they immediately ordered you to pin down the Tōkaidō army. Then they raided the enemy's disrupted ranks."

Edward correctly described what had happened over the course of those

dozens of minutes as though he had witnessed it first hand.

"However, the enemy commander knew very well that," Edward shrugged, "as long as they calmly maintained the status quo... All they needed to do was stay in formation and handle Defoe and Chamberlain's little tricks, then victory was theirs for the taking with numerical superiority on their side."

Morrigan's doll eyes widened. Her commander's eyes of wisdom had astounded her.

As always, Edward had a full and detailed grasp of what had occurred in a distant battlefield.

"Since you know, so well... Why not send, other Chevaliers to Fuji?"

"Insufficient manpower. Besides, don't be silly." Edward sighed. "It's not like I am a prophet or have clairvoyance. How could I possibly predict everything about the enemy before the battle started?"

"Your abilities approach, clairvoyance already."

Morrigan's tone sounded more like sarcasm than praise.

She knew that this was neither magic nor extrasensory perception.

In his past life, Prince Edward had accumulated countless experience across hellish battlefields, naturally honing a sharp sense of perception.

Perhaps the enemy general tonight was equally wise and insightful?

Meanwhile, Edward fell into deep thought.

"Attacking Fuji from Suruga at this point in time. The strategic openings caused by Uncle's defeat that cannot be plugged until tomorrow or the day after..."

Analyzing the reasons for the defeat, the prince was showing signs of a smile on the corners of his mouth.

"He must be the one in command after all?"

At that moment, Morrigan sensed noetic waves.

A noetic officer had reported the arrival of a small messenger retainer beast sent from the Fuji tutelary fort and was requesting Commander-in-Chief

Edward's decision.

"Prince, the Fuji tutelary fort has sent a message. 'Requesting dialogue between Hakone and Fuji'."

"Oh?"

The Black Prince smiled in amusement, sounding like a mischievous child in tone.

"Morrigan, help me dial that thing... called a fixed line telephone, is it? Call the command center at the Fuji tutelary fort. The other side will pick up right away."

"Affirmative." Morrigan nodded and did as requested by the medieval hero who was unused to operating modern contraptions.

Hakone Checkpoint and the Fuji tutelary fort.

After the British forces captured them, these two places came under the Restoration Alliance's control, and they usually kept close contact through frequent telephone calls.

Morrigan operated the telephone on the office desk.

She turned on the speaker phone and invited her boss to speak.

"Hello," Edward spoke a greeting to the phone.

'Are you there?' Soon after, a reply was heard on the speaker. Morrigan had recollections of this voice, it was Tachibana Masatsugu. She had previously encountered this Tōkaidō Chevalier in the outskirts of Fuji City.

'I was thinking—Perhaps you might come to Fuji yourself, Prince.'

"I have some important matters to handle at Hakone, but I did dispatch my personal guard. Three hundred Knights of the Garter are headed towards Fuji City."

'Meaning you won't be coming in person, Prince?'

"To be honest, I do regret my decision. I never thought you would run all the way over to Fuji."

Edward shrugged.

As soon as he received news of a "surprise attack on Fuji," he had immediately dispatched an army of black knights.

With Morgan le Fay's support on the battlefield, victory was assured even without the Black Prince's personal presence. Naturally, that only applied against ordinary enemies.

Morrigan held back her feelings of humiliation while listening to her superior's conversation.

"I heard you were quite active in Nagoya this morning too, Tachibana-dono. Appearing everywhere in less than half a day, now that is truly elusive... No."

The legendary prince smiled while he conversed with the mysterious enemy general over the phone.

"Rather, celerity is the soul of warfare, wouldn't you agree? Magnificent. Those self-proclaimed military advisers always love to pointlessly deliberate over intricate tactics or unusual strategies. Yet the vital principle of celerity is lost upon them where the swift and maneuverable triumphs over the slow and ponderous. Tachibana-dono, you are well-versed in the key principles of warfare."

'.....'

"Your trap for defeating Uncle and the constant traveling for the past two days, every move of yours has been profoundly fascinating. What I truly want —"

Edward paused and switched to a provocative tone of voice.

"What I truly want is your name and to conduct a bit of research on that."

'Not at all, you praise me too much... So, what are your plans?'

"Well, I shall order my black knights to halt their march while I take to the field... A duel with you ought to be the ideal choice."

'The Lionheart last night and the Black Prince tonight. Two consecutive evenings of extravagant banquets.'

"Indeed. Last night, even though Uncle attacked in full force, you were able to achieve victory by using fewer than four hundred Legions. Such extraordinary

methods."

'I was at wit's end too.'

"Quite so. However, thanks to your painstaking conservation of forces, I believe you probably hold five or six hundred red-purple swordsmen in peak condition, yes? Or perhaps, even more than that."

Morrigan widened her eyes in surprise.

The Black Prince was positing that the mysterious general, Tachibana Masatsugu, had a Chevalier Strength surpassing 1000.

Edward's own Chevalier Strength reached as high as 1256. He believed his opponent to be a famous general on the same level, a mighty hero rivaling the likes of Richard the Lionheart, Julius Caesar, or Admiral Nelson— "Yesterday, the quantity of your Legions was unnaturally low... When I learned of that, I was wondering if you had deliberately conserved troops as a precaution in case I attacked. Would I be bragging if I said that?"

'No comment. I have only one thing to say to you.' On the other side of the call, Tachibana Masatsugu spoke indifferently, '...My side is prepared to defeat your English longbow formation at Hakone, the one we saw a few days ago.'

"Oh? My 'mode anglais'?"

'If you cannot wait, I don't mind demonstrating it at Fuji tonight.'

"Superb. My blood boils in excitement for the first time since my arrival to Japan. Since you say so, Tachibana-dono, I shall *meet you in battle* in perfect English style."

'It's a promise.'

"Then today's fighting shall conclude here."

'We will fight another day at Hakone.'

"Yes, this is the promise between you and me."

The conversation ended and the other side hung up.

The effect of the Feat of Arms—Archers of Crécy was to switch the Garter Knights' weapons to bows to create a team of longbowmen. This Feat of Arms

was virtually synonymous to the name of Prince Edward.

And defeating this formation had been brought up in this conversation between two master generals.

In other words, this was a preliminary skirmish where knightly and samurai honor were at stake.

"Perhaps... Tachibana-dono isn't actually a 'samurai'?"

Once again, his whispered comment shocked Morrigan.

Meanwhile, at the castellan's office in the Fuji tutelary fort...

Just earlier, this room had still belonged to two British Chevaliers.

Sitting on a rocking chair in the room was a doll resembling a living girl. It had the appearance of a petite Caucasian blonde beauty, dressed in a sailor outfit.

According to speculation from noetic officers, this was a genie's simulacrum.

"Hey Onii-sama."

"What's up?"

Masatsugu had just ended his conversation with Prince Edward at Hakone.

After winning the battle between Legions, taking Hatsune and ground forces along, Masatsugu had entered the Fuji tutelary fort and captured various facilities.

Securing the office took first priority.

After doing that, he had sent a message demanding to speak with Hakone.

"The Black Prince thinks you're conserving the Kanesadas... But actually, Onii-sama, you don't have many troops left, do you?"

"I don't."

Legions that fall in battle near their stronghold would resurrect in roughly a day.

"Near" specifically referred to within ten kilometers. But last night, Masatsugu had gone beyond the ten-kilometer range to engage Richard's army at Mount

Satsuta.

Back then, he lost a hundred and sixty Legions whose revival would take at least a week.

It is particularly easy to replenish troop numbers when fighting at one's stronghold.

This was the greatest feature of home advantage.

Moreover, Masatsugu was handicapped by *the inability to replenish ectoplasmic fluid the normal way*. At the present moment, the maximum number of Legions he could summon would be around a hundred and twenty.

"Onii-sama, it's because of your various ingenious moves that the legendary Black Prince thinks you're his equal, right? This is part of your power, I guess?" Hatsune commented poignantly. "It's just that it feels like scamming."

"Don't put it like that. There are three main points to remember when confronting a major nation's army with a smaller force. First of all, deception. Secondly, intimidation. Finally..."

"Don't tell me it's bluffing?"

"Correct. You're good at figuring this out."

"Luckily, the prince really fell for it."

"Now that's not really correct." Masatsugu told the naive little sister. "The English formation is *actually more suited to defense than offense*. This is why he didn't take the bait when I tempted him to attack Fuji. Instead, he said he'd meet me in battle at Hakone. That was a declaration made with absolute certainty of victory."

"More suited to defense than offense?"

"That's right. Before the actual battle, I'll need to come up with a solution."

"W-What? Even the mention of a way to defeat them was a bluff?"

"Exactly. Anyway, there's no need to fight again tonight, so that's pretty good already."

"I suppose. Worry about tomorrow when tomorrow comes."

Hatsune drew upon the bold and unfettered nature unique to her clan of larger-than-life characters and agreed with Masatsugu.

Masatsugu slowly said to his little sister, "By the way, Hatsune. I've been meaning to ask you for a favor, so let me take this chance to tell you."

"What's the matter? You look so serious, you know?"

"You still remember there's a school festival to be held at the beginning of next month, right? I'm a member of the executive committee after all, and in charge of the beauty contest to boot. There aren't enough contestants and I'd like your full support..."

Hatsune stared at her older brother in rare gaze of criticism.

Masatsugu felt quite troubled and wanted to know the reason.

"What's with you?"

"We are currently fighting the Restoration Alliance. Aren't you way out of line for bringing up a beauty contest?"

"Excessive suppression of entertainment during times like these would not be a good thing. People have to find chances to relax. The other students and I all need to take a breather."

"Onii-sama, you're really looking forward to it, aren't you...?"

"Suruga's situation will be improving now that the Tōkaidō Fiefdom has retaken Fuji City. Events like the school festival or the beauty contest should be able to proceed without problems."

"Why does it feel like you specifically recaptured Fuji City for the sake of the beauty contest?"

"....."

"O-Onii-sama!?"

Masatsugu invoked his right to silence to avoid putting his foot into his mouth.

Part 4

November 12th.

Four days had gone by since the fall of Nagoya and the recapture of Fuji City.

"I'm so touched. I haven't seen shops this packed with merchandise for so long."

"Supplies are coming in every day from Yamanashi after all."

Hatsune and Masatsugu were chatting inside a supermarket in Suruga City.

The two of them had gone out for shopping.

This was a large store not far from the student dormitories. Just recently, the food and drink sections had been cleaned out with almost no merchandise at all.

Although supplies could not be considered abundant at the moment, at least half the shelf space was being occupied by merchandise.

Fresh food such as meat, vegetables, or fish, and other goods such as instant food or sweets were finally replenished.

"My days of destitution, forced to water down flour, then bake and flavor it as a substitute for snacks, has finally come to an end..."

"I can't believe you went that far."

"Man does not live on bread alone, Onii-sama."

Suruga and its surroundings had been blockaded by the Restoration Alliance for over a month.

Neither people nor goods were allowed to flow, thus interrupting all logistics. Thanks to the municipal government and the tutelary fort managing and rationing of food, crisis was narrowly averted.

After revealing she had moonlighted as a crisis pastry chef, Hatsune said solemnly, "I can't say there's an abundance of goods, but being able to shop is a good thing at least."

"Yes. The earlier situation was like those countries whose economies collapsed from hyperinflation."

This social commentary came from Okonogi Taisei's mouth.

"It's like having money but no goods to buy... I'm so touched that there's bread for sale at the school snack shop today."

Taisei was the student council vice-president and also one of Masatsugu's few friends.

Both Hatsune and the lady she served, Princess Shiori, were living in the Black Lily Dorm reserved for the princess' exclusive use. After school today, Hatsune and Masatsugu had gone shopping for dorm supplies and food.

Before returning to his home in the city, Taisei tagged along with them to stroll around.

"Masatsugu-kun, this is all thanks to you guys for taking back Fuji City."

"The many Chevaliers brought back from Nagoya are a major reason too. Now we've got a lot more troops and commanders."

West of Suruga City was Kakegawa City and its tutelary fort.

East of Suruga City was Fuji City and its tutelary fort.

For the past month, both sides had been occupied by Restoration Alliance forces. Railways leading east and west were completely shut down while roads were blocked too.

However, north of Fuji City was a usable national highway.

This highway led to Yamanashi Prefecture, which was part of the Tōkaidō Fiefdom.

After recapturing Fuji City, vehicles could finally come and go through the "Shizuoka to Yamanashi" route along Suruga-Fuji-Fujinomiya-Koufu.

Of course, ordinary cars were still restricted from free passage.

However, protected truck convoys transporting supplies were allowed to travel without impediment.

The various tutelary forts in Suruga, Fuji, and southern Yamanashi were responsible for protecting the truck convoys.

A defensive line had been set up by deploying the Chevaliers whom Masatsugu and company had brought from Nagoya and previously rescued from the Fuji tutelary fort.

"The land of Japan has mountains everywhere." Masatsugu muttered, "Hence, the first priority in ground transportation is to secure mountain routes. Regions like the plains of Kantō are actually exceptions..."

"But it's too early to celebrate the current situation, right?"

"You're right. Starting from Kakegawa, everywhere west of Suruga is within the Restoration Alliance's sphere of influence. On the east, Hakone and the Izu Peninsula are also captured by the Alliance. They also have command of the sea in Suruga Bay."

Taisei was not too optimistic and Masatsugu told him the truth.

"The east and west are under enemy control. This situation hasn't changed very much."

"Yeah."

"That sounds kinda like the game Reversi. Surrounded by enemies up, down, left, right, it feels like it's almost game over."

Hatsune's comment prompted Masatsugu to nod.

"Ultimately, this is a game of capturing castles. The more tutelary forts you have, the greater the advantage. You're instantly disadvantaged if you get surrounded or caught between two fronts. It's admittedly similar to Reversi in a way."



"It becomes very easy to understand if I use this kind of mindset... Oh right, Onii-sama." Mid-sentence, Hatsune pointed at the top shelf. "Help me get that, will you? It's a special okonomiyaki sauce that Kansai people like to use."

"This one?"

Masatsugu's height was 175cm while Hatsune was around 160cm tall.

Fulfilling his duty as a taller man, he took the required item and handed it to his little sister. Dressed in *Haikara-san* style, Hatsune smiled tenderly.

Watching their interactions, Taisei suddenly said, "Recently, you two have a different vibe going there."

"Eh?"

Hatsune jumped in surprise at the unexpected observation.

Taisei continued, "You seem to be closer than before. It's like you're real siblings now."

"W-Well of course. Onii-sama and I are together—uh, working hard together. For the princess and Suruga's safety, we're working our butts off."

"So your tacit understanding has improved too, I see?"

Taisei showed a look of comprehension whereas Hatsune looked extremely shy.

Listening to their conversation, Masatsugu thought to himself.

Okonogi Taisei was a high school student with handsome facial features.

However, he was a blockhead and never the subject of romantic gossip. The fact that he failed to use words like 'couple' or 'newlyweds' as description here was fully indicative of his true character.

This friend left the supermarket alone to return to his home in the city.

"Onii-sama, let's go to the tutelary fort next."

"Sure."

Left alone as a pair, the Tachibana siblings exited the store and went to the parking lot.

Getting around the Suruga suburbs was very inconvenient without your own car. This was quite different from the suburbs of Tokyo. Parked inside the parking lot was a car kept in "reserve" at the princess' personal dorm.

According to Imperial Japan's laws, sixteen was the minimum age for a driving license.

Hatsune was in charge of driving while Masatsugu sat in the front passenger seat.

"Sheesh, that Taisei-san. I can't believe he blurted out something like that. My heart almost jumped out of my mouth," Hatsune said before starting the engine.

"He just said we seem to be close, right?"

"T-True, but we have many special reasons behind that."

"And they are?"

"Think about it. Every morning lately, the two of us have been together..."

Hatsune was referring to her job of supplying ectoplasmic fluid to Tachibana Masatsugu.

This role had currently fallen upon Hatsune. Princess Shiori had secretly provided the service before, but the heavy strain had taken a toll on the princess' health.

For this purpose, Masatsugu had been going to Hatsune's personal room for the past few days.

Inside the princess' dorm, there was a bedroom used by the lady-in-waiting and bodyguard.

Every morning, Masatsugu would quietly visit her room where Hatsune had risen from bed early to engage in intimate skin contact with him, allowing him to absorb warmth and ectoplasmic fluid from her body.

Hatsune had her duties as lady-in-waiting so her mornings were quite busy.

Hence, Masatsugu always visited at around 5am while the sky was still dark. Today was no exception.

Having got up already, Hatsune was wearing just an undershirt, shyly welcoming Masatsugu's arrival.

The two of them started by drinking green tea first, sitting together on the bed's edge— Only after chatting awkwardly for a brief while did Hatsune finally speak up timidly.

'O-Onii-sama, it's time to start...'

'Yeah.'

With Hatsune's permission, Masatsugu reached out.

He would skillfully take Hatsune into his arms without being too forceful.

'It's my fault that the princess had to endure excessive strain. I need to be careful from now on to avoid the same mistake.'

'Don't worry, my body is very healthy.'

'That's true, you've got a great body.'

'I know, right? I work out diligently.'

Hatsune had misunderstood Masatsugu's comment.

Her build was slender but the bust and hip areas were quite voluptuous.

In the beginning, woman was the sun—Hatsune's figure reminded Masatsugu of this quote. Embracing her body, he enjoyed an indescribable sense of satisfaction.

Hugging her tightly against his bosom, he could feel a clear sense of elasticity and tactile feedback.

Furthermore, Hatsune's body was always fiery hot rather than just warm.

Perhaps it was due to excellent blood circulation or her younger mental age. Recently, Masatsugu had been hugging Hatsune's body every morning.

Needless to say, their behavior was not limited to hugging alone.

Masatsugu brought his face against Hatsune's body and kissed the little sister's tender skin and neck.

'Mm, mmmmmm!'

Lovely moaning escaped from her lips.

Perhaps she was startled by Masatsugu's cold skin and the physical pleasure. However, she still accepted Masatsugu's embrace wholeheartedly...

Hatsune's undershirt opened up in front of Masatsugu.

He would enjoy the close-up view of the little sister's deep cleavage at every opportunity.

He could even remove Hatsune's undershirt. Whether to do so or not depended entirely on his choice. Initially resistant, the little sister would waver and grumble, but she probably would not refuse.

Finally, Hatsune was guaranteed to yield obediently, actively offering her tender skin to warm up Masatsugu...

However, Masatsugu did not actually do it. It would be best to save this sort of behavior until their relationship had progressed even further, such as when this maiden accepted Masatsugu's marriage proposal.

Such a moment was expected to be in the near future.

In any case, Hatsune tolerated Masatsugu's behavior, ending up disheveled and moaning. Then she would grumble quietly in a submissive voice.

'Sheesh... Onii-sama, your hands are so naughty, every time...'

With her cheeks reddened in shame, there was reproach in Hatsune's tone.

Most people probably would not find Tachibana Hatsune very feminine as a girl.

However, these expressions of hers shown only to Masatsugu were truly too innocent, adorable, and endearing.

West of Suruga City was the mountainous region formed by the adjacent peaks of Mount Udo and Mount Kunou.

Driving swiftly along the mountain road, Hatsune soon reached the Suruga tutelary fort.

"Hatsune, you have many duties in the mornings, right?"

Masatsugu spoke up from the front passenger seat. He believed that the daily resupplying of ectoplasmic fluid did not necessarily have to be done in the mornings.

"Why don't I switch to visiting your room at night from now on..."

"N-No way. If it's at night, the princess might not have gone to sleep yet. If she were to notice sounds or other signs of us doing *that...*"

Hatsune shook her head, refusing to perform the ritual at night.

"If we're discovered, that'd be pretty embarrassing—no, it's extremely embarrassing..."

"Oh?"

"S-So that's why it has to be early morning. The princess is still sleeping at that hour."

"I see."

Speaking of which, their lady liege had a number of special powers.

Shiori's sixth sense or intuition was apparently quite sharp. Precisely because of that, she seemed more sensitive to secrets than the average person... Something like that.

Take this morning for example.

When Masatsugu was heading to the dorm entrance after leaving Hatsune's room...

He had encountered the princess by chance. She was dressed for bed in a nightgown.

'W-What is the matter, Masatsugu-dono?'

Shiori was already up at 6am.

Masatsugu did not know if she happened to have gotten up early, or if she secretly rose from bed only because she sensed something. In any case, the princess' countenance looked quite flustered.

'Why are you returning—c-correction—Why are you coming to the dormitory at this hour...?'

'I left something here.'

'Oh... I see.'

After the conversation, Shiori had hastily returned inside.

Was it possible that the princess had noticed signs of her two personal subordinates secretly sharing ectoplasmic fluid, and thus beset with mixed feelings, she was pacing back and forth inside the dorm in agitation?

This could very well be true.

"By the way, Onii-sama, I'd like to talk about the princess with you."

Unexpectedly, Hatsune brought up the lady they served.

"Recently when the princess is with us, have you noticed she's got this vibe like she wants to say something but can't? Like there's something she needs to get off her chest."

"....."

"Sometimes, she gives off this kind of 'I can't bring myself to say it despite this burning urge!' aura."

"Maybe you're not imagining things."

"I know, right!? Surely, it's because she has too many worries about the futures of Japan and Tōkaidō and it's weighing on her heart, which is why she wants to confide in us."

"Oh?"

"Onii-sama, let's work hard and help lift the princess' spirits!"

"Got it."

Tachibana Hatsune's benevolence and naivete was not quite the same as Okonogi Taisei's obliviousness.

Masatsugu found his little sister's brand of liberal-mindedness quite adorable and endearing. In contrast, their lady liege's personality was much more complicated.

Simultaneously good and evil, willing to resort to ruthless means, yet she had

an innocent maidenly side to her.

Fujinomiya Shiori was smart and eloquent. There were very few matters she would have trouble broaching. Perhaps he should approach her to have a detailed discussion some time soon.

"Onii-sama, we're almost there."

But before that, Masatsugu and company had to take care of a matter at the Suruga tutelary fort first.

Today, they were having a *meeting* with the Governor General, Akigase Shouzan.

Part 5

"Retirement?"

Princess Shiori had trouble hiding the surprise in her tone.

However, she immediately understood the underlying reason and asked the old Governor General, "Is your intention to resign as Governor General to take responsibility for Nagoya's fall?"

"It is exactly as you say, Your Highness." Akigase Shouzan admitted it readily.

They were conversing in a special sickroom at the Suruga tutelary fort's medical division. Governor General Akigase Shouzan was currently still here, recovering from heavy injuries.

The elderly man had used the princess' visit as an opportunity to declare his intention.

He had said he was going to relinquish the position of Tōkaidō Governor General in the next few days. At this moment, Masatsugu was standing behind the princess while Hatsune had left to wait outside the sickroom.

Currently, Masatsugu's lady liege was not showing any signs of the "anxious" demeanor that the siblings were discussing earlier.

With a brilliantly intellectual and dignified countenance, she was facing the Tōkaidō Governor General.

"I failed to repel the Restoration Alliance and even lost the provincial capital of Nagoya. My disgrace knows no bounds..."

Akigase Rikka's father spoke in self-mockery.

He deliberately got up from the bed and sat down on his wheelchair to greet the princess. The elderly Governor General narrowed his eyes and looked resentfully at his beloved daughter who was by his side, looking after him.

"I am supposed to disembowel myself and apologize to the people and my retainers through death."

"I have said this already. Doing something like that would do irreparable harm to people's impressions of the Tōkaidō Fiefdom."

Rikka interrupted her father unceremoniously.

She was here as a daughter to look after her hospitalized father, but she remained in her black military uniform.

"Even back in the Sengoku period, few daimyo actually went that far. Since we are no longer the Great Empire of Japan either, no one would think of a captain going down with his ship as an inspiring story. Of course, there might be some Chevaliers who would share your sentiments deeply... But the civilian populace and the media will be horrified."

Rikka explained her opinion at length.

"The people nowadays are very realistic. Besides, House Akigase only came to rule Tōkaidō for the last fifty years. The previous rulers were part of the southern court—in other words, the Empire's administration, who were preceded by a daimyo whose clan traces back to the Tokugawa lineage. Even if you commit suicide, Father, chances are unlikely that people will feel touched."

"Hmph..."

House Akigase's eldest daughter pulled no punches against her injured father.

However, the father and daughter got along with a harmonious vibe without any feeling of ill will. Perhaps this was simply a natural "family discussion."

To have discussions of this sort between parent and child, House Akigase truly lived up to its name as a prestigious samurai family.

After some contemplation, Masatsugu spoke up, "Well then, Your Excellency."

Everyone's gaze gathered upon him. In terms of status, he was actually the most respected here. Openly without regard for details of etiquette, Masatsugu asked a direct question.

"May I ask who do you have in mind as your successor?"

"Certainly, Masatsugu-dono." Akigase Shouzan was willing to speak as equals too.

He looked squarely at Masatsugu then sneaked a glance at his daughter standing on the side.

"I have three children... Rikka has two younger brothers. Unfortunately, they are not even half the man my daughter is. Although Rikka is a woman—"

"You wish for Rikka-dono to succeed you, right?"

"Precisely."

Masatsugu read the intent of the elderly Governor General's gaze and he admitted it solemnly.

Shiori raised her worries, "I believe that Rikka-sama is undoubtedly the best candidate for leading the fiefdom out of the current predicament. The problem is, will your two sons—especially the eldest son—have any objections...?"

"Indeed, Your Highness, your worries are perfectly logical." Akigase Shouzan grinned slightly mischievously and laughed. "Fortunately, they are rather weak in personality and completely submissive in the presence of their elder sister. Furthermore, unlike Rikka, they would not be considered first-rate generals of Tōkaidō. Consequently, I do not expect them to stubbornly press the issue. On the other hand, the ones likely to complain are..."

"Certain retainers, perhaps? For example, your sons' closest advisers."

"Hahahaha, you are truly perceptive, Your Highness."

The elderly Governor General narrowed his eyes, quite amused by the princess' intelligence.

In Imperial Japan, the position of Governor General was hereditary while male succession was an unwritten rule. For those who cling stubbornly to formalities and traditions, it would be very displeasing for Rikka to succeed to the position as a woman.

Needless to say, this was even more so for guardians of the *Governor General's sons*—

This was what Shiori was worrying about, but Rikka's father laughed with

fortitude.

"The previous Governor General, Akigase Shouzan, will become the shield to back the new Governor General and watch those retainers carefully... This is already my plan. As long as these old bones of mine remain and the Restoration Alliance's uprising persists, Rikka's position will be secure."

"In practice, things will be hardly any different from before," Rikka finally spoke.

She had remained silent ever since the matter of succession came up.

"My main role is a general. Moreover, Tōkaidō currently cannot afford the luxury of leaving a Chevalier like me back in the castle to conserve forces."

Rikka praised herself in partial jest then smiled proudly.

"I will continue to manage military matters as the premier Chevalier, and while I am at it, I will also carry the promotional banner of 'the new Governor General' in an effort to win as much popularity as possible. Chores on the administrative side will be handled by my father."

Rikka's explanation drew a scoff from her father.

However, Rikka bluntly stated that her father had nothing to do after retirement anyway.

"After the recent fiascoes, it is imperative for the Tōkaidō Fiefdom to regain the people's trust and support. To do that, we need to craft some good scenarios, such as 'the daughter of the previous Governor General, a lady Chevalier who holds her own against any man, shall lead the Tōkaidō Fiefdom to drive out the Restoration Alliance'..."

"I now understand your concerns. In that case, I would like to make a request here."

Shiori smiled demurely and said to the father and daughter of House Akigase.

"Please allow me to deliver a 'sales pitch' here."

"Oh? What would a noble princess like you be selling, Your Highness?"

"Strength and wisdom."

Shiori replied without a moment's delay to the elderly man in the wheelchair. "I have a proposal for the new Governor General of Tōkaidō and the Governor General's father. Are the two of you willing to seek assistance from us—Fujinomiya Shiori and her retinue? If you were to hire us in some form, we would render services commensurate to our remuneration and status."

"In other words, assistance from Your Highness Shiori, Masatsugu-dono, and Tachibana Hatsune?" The Chevalier princess, who had decided to succeed as the new Governor General, murmured to the smiling imperial princess.

Fujinomiya Shiori and Akigase Rikka faced off squarely.

"I have personally witnessed the power all of you have exhibited... Regardless of a retired old man's opinion, you are all talented individuals whom I am willing to hire at a premium. However, the issue here is..."

Rikka first cast a gaze to restrain her father, who evidently had words, while voicing her concerns.

"Wouldn't the act of hiring a vaunted imperial princess be far too disrespectful...?"

"If an employment contract does not work in this case, I am amenable to alternate titles such as consultant, house guest, or freeloader. The main point here is that I will enter a contract with House Akigase on a personal basis, unrelated to the imperial family—That is the kind of relationship I wish for."

"Unrelated to the imperial family, a relationship between Your Highness Shiori and House Akigase?"

"Indeed. To elaborate further, it is also my personal relationship with you, Akigase Rikka-sama."

"I see."

Exhibiting fortitude no less than her father's, Rikka smiled cheerfully.

"Well, it is understandable. The imperial capital of Tokyo is definitely not a comfortable homeland for Your Highness Shiori."

"Perhaps it might be inappropriate for me to say so myself, but the presence of a princess like me is nothing more than a nuisance that nobody wants."

After making fun of herself, Shiori added confidently, "However, that only applies during times of normalcy. I believe that I possess irreplaceable talents needed by the current Tōkaidō."

"This I do not dispute... Father, what are your thoughts?"

"Recruiting someone of such exalted status, it is precisely as Her Highness described, a load of 'nuisance' beyond a doubt." Akigase Shouzan shrugged with a wry expression. "Unfortunately, we are in no position to be picky at the moment. Besides, the princess has 'Hijikata Toshizō' in her service, truly an opportunity we cannot afford to miss."

"Your Excellency," Masatsugu smiled with a twitch of his cheek. "Surely, you must have your own thoughts regarding this name."

"Yes, I have heard the details, Tachibana-dono. I have only one piece of advice on this subject..."

The sly old fox declared boldly.

"It is actually unimportant whether or not you are the real Hijikata Toshizō. The crux of the matter is that the one playing that role must be a hero equal to or greater than Hijikata-dono—such that no one will doubt the use of his name."

"Playing a role, huh?"

"The simple fact that Hijikata Toshizō is on our side is already enough to encourage our soldiers and Chevaliers. This is a much welcome talisman for the disadvantaged Tōkaidō. However, I do express my apologies to you, Tachibana-dono."

"No, I don't mind at all." Recalling the recapture of Fuji a few days ago, Masatsugu said very honestly, "I have no attachment to names, so it doesn't matter to me. Although I am sorry to 'the real one'... the Hijikata Toshizō signboard has been pretty handy. Since everyone supports my using it, I will continue to do so with gratitude."

"Oh my, how unexpected," the elderly Governor General smiled wryly again. "Tachibana-dono, should I call you inconstant or honest? Normally speaking, great heroes, whose mighty names shook the world in the past, tend to obsess

over reputation far more than the average person..."

"Is that how it goes?"

"Certainly. Dai-Nankō Kusunoki Masahige-dono and Lord Sanada Nobushige, Resurrectees who descended to the world during the bygone Great Empire of Japan, were said to be like that."

"Oh?"

Masatsugu could sense from Akigase Shouzan the smell of a seasoned veteran.

As a result, Masatsugu felt a sense of camaraderie with him.

Watching this "nameless Resurrectee" in front of him, the elderly Governor General muttered, "During the Empire's defeat in the Second World War, those heroes either died in combat or were sealed away. Otherwise, there would be no need for you to stoop down to playing such a role, Tachibana-dono."

"....."

"Speaking of Resurrectees, I wonder what is Rome's founder up to nowadays."

The Eastern Roman Empire's generalissimo was an extraordinary hero of unparalleled greatness.

This foreigner wielded greater influence over Tōkaidō's fate than even Edward the Black Prince. As soon as he was brought up, Akigase Shouzan sighed.

Part 6

A lone bird flew across the ocean.

However, it was no seabird but a giant eagle with a wingspan reaching almost four meters.

This type of bird was seldom found offshore or out in the open sea in the first place. Furthermore, the bird's size had far exceeded the standards of large birds of prey. In other words, this giant eagle was a retainer beast.

The aquila was a mid-size retainer beast employed by the Eastern Roman Empire.

The great eagle flew across the Pacific Ocean and the East China Sea, finally reaching the territorial waters of the Eastern Roman Empire. This air journey had traversed two thousand and seven hundred kilometers.

The starting point of the journey was Suruga City in the Tōkaidō region of Japan.

The retainer beast had spent roughly twenty hours to reach the military port at the south of Lantau Island in Hong Kong.

Such unbelievable speed and stamina would be beyond ordinary birds. The aquila had flown straight to its destination, a large *Galleon*-class ship, the *Ferrata*.

The ship was powered by a fluid reactor using artificial ectoplasmic fluid.

The British Empire's analog would be the destroyer *Tintagel*.

The person sought by the aquila was alone on the deck, observing his ship with satisfaction.

This Resurrectee was dressed in ancient Roman style with a red cape on top. This was the state ship belonging to Generalissimo Caesar, the great hero and

founder of Eastern Rome.

When the aquila retainer beast landed in front of him, Caesar asked matter-of-factly, "So you have arrived, Staff Officer Yang. How is your new life at the Suruga tutelary fort?"

"Do you even need to ask? I can't expect to eat authentic Chinese cuisine at the mess hall there." What came out of the aquila's beak was the voice and tone of Alexis Yang.

"Their so-called Chinese food only consists of fried rice, ramen noodles, fried dumplings, and a mysterious item named *tenshindon*."

"Oh?"

"I'd really like to return to Hong Kong as soon as possible and take my daughter out for some authentic Cantonese cuisine."

"Spoken magnificently like a true gourmet and not a man who always eats out at fast food joints."

"Well, people only remember the good things about their homeland when they're abroad."

Alexis Yang was a Roman soldier who did not take things too seriously.

His physical body was currently lying on a bed in the Suruga tutelary fort's barracks, seemingly taking a nap.

However, Yang was a noetic officer.

Using noetic control, he had possessed the aquila with his consciousness to travel to Hong Kong.

The purpose was to report directly to the supreme commander Caesar and handle "a certain matter" while he was at it.

"In any case, adjustments on various fronts seem to be proceeding smoothly."

"Speaking of which, Your Excellency, you are finally coming in person..."

"Yes. Once matters are handled on the Malay side, I shall be heading to Japan," Caesar said to Staff Officer Yang who was possessing the retainer beast.

"Storming the Kinai Fiefdom as soon as I reach Japan... It might be an unruly

manner of going about it, but certainly a good plan."

"Another 'Conquest of Gaul'?"

The great hero smiled like a mischievous brat, prompting Staff Officer Yang to bring up that piece of history.

Prior to becoming dictator in perpetuity, Caesar had embarked on an expedition to ancient Gaul—an area covering modern France and part of Germany—as the supreme commander to put down the Gallic tribes' rebellions.

The wars had lasted many years.

The famous *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* was his firsthand account of the wars.

"This may sound lacking in detailed planning, but in any case, we shall make minor adjustments as dictated by the situation. Adapting on the spot is the name of the game here."

"Are you going to write another book and use a global simultaneous release gimmick?"

"That would certainly be desirable if I could spend a couple years to focus on matters in Japan. The biggest obstacle is whether this much time can be secured."

"Or why not follow the original plan and basically leave things to the Japanese samurai?"

"Yes. Biding my time while our Tōkaidō allies fight repeatedly against the British Empire's brave warriors, only to enter the stage gallantly when both sides are exhausted... That would be the ideal situation."

"Intelligently snatching away the greatest benefits at the ideal moment, in other words."

Their conversation sounded more like an exchange of jabs or jokes.

However, it also reflected human malice and guile.

Caesar said to his staff officer who was in the form of a giant eagle, "I heard that the Tōkaidō side is aided by a Resurrectee named 'Hijikata Tōshizō', isn't

that right?"

"Yes, he was the Shinsengumi vice-commander during Japan's Bakumatsu era, and subsequently the commander of shogunate troops for the northern court. Judging from his life's experiences, he shouldn't be someone used to leading large armies."

Staff Officer Yang was an expert on the Far East region and knew Japan like the back of his hand.

He was well aware of what Hijikata Tōshizō was like as a historical figure.

"That Resurrectee has done quite well so far."

"Then how is our beautiful princess... Shiori?"

"You were right on the mark, Your Excellency. Under that beautiful exterior, she hides dangerous fangs and claws... But the princess' skill at putting on a facade are superb." Through the aquila, Staff Officer Yang asked, "How did you manage to see through her?"

"Shiori had been studying at our imperial capital of Xanadu until half a year ago. During her stay, a number of incidents happened around her. On the surface, none of them had any connection to her, but she was always the ultimate beneficiary—"

"Heh~ Now that's quite something."

"I am Imperial Japan's *patronus* after all. How could I not keep myself informed regarding their nation's beautiful princess? Hence, I paid particular attention to her affairs. Furthermore, it always boils down to this."

A charming smile appeared on Caesar's face.

"Julius Caesar has a special talent with women... You could consider that the true reason why I saw through her."

"Yeah yeah, the great man with special skills in adultery is truly extraordinary."

There was a rumor back in the day when Caesar had a seat in the Senate of the Roman Republic.

He actively ingratiated himself with the wives of his senator colleagues, building "deep" relationships with these women.

"By the way, Your Excellency, should I inform Her Highness Shiori and her faction that *he* will be entering Tokyo—?"

"Yes, proceed."

"Even if I reveal his name?"

"His reputation is so great that anyone with a discerning eye cannot be deceived."

"Understood. No need to hold back information, in other words."

Hearing the generalissimo's instructions, Staff Officer Yang remarked through the aquila, "The hidden 'secret weapon' will be unveiled at last, huh?"

"From the very start, he was a trump card to be deployed eventually. Let this be an opportunity for him to put on a grand performance."

"But that's pretty difficult given his personality, right? He really hates attracting attention despite his outstanding talents and accomplishments."

"Be that as it may, he is not only a talented general but also capable of handling court ladies and those of high position."

Caesar looked into the sky. It was sunny with few clouds.

This land was neither the ancient Roman Republic nor the deep forests of ancient Gaul. Instead, this was subtropical Asia in the land of the Far East.

"As a general for keeping Tokyo secure, there is no man more perfect for the job."

Caesar had personally selected a certain man to protect the imperial capital and the Kantō Fiefdom.

Unlike the Roman patrician Julius Caesar, this man hailed from the land of China.

However, the battlefields he roamed in his past life were mostly around or beyond the borders of China. Vast plains of grassland or deserts stretching to the horizon.

That man. Edward the Black Prince. Richard the Lionheart. Hijikata Toshizō.

The cast was gradually gathering for the main event in Imperial Japan.

Or rather, Imperial Japan was about to become the center of a storm.
Determined to rush into this vortex of conflict, Caesar grinned.

Chapter 3 - Restless Warlords

Part 1

Back when Shiori first appointed Tachibana Hatsune as her personal lady-in-waiting, this was the first thing she told Hatsune.

"The Empress and her inner circle all resent me very much."

"Eh!?" Hatsune was very surprised, apparently unaware of such things.

At the time, Shiori was still at the imperial capital of Tokyo. This conversation had taken place in September.

"Your Highness, you're so pretty, smart too, and an amazing person..."

Why would such a lady be the target of resentment?

Shiori did not hide anything and candidly told this new and inquisitive lady-in-waiting, "The qualities you mentioned are precisely the reasons why I am resented. Beautiful and smart as I am, if I were to stay by Her Majesty's side as a foil, the comparison would reflect poorly on her."

"....."

"Oh no, please do not mistake this for bragging, what I am describing was simply the other side's mindset!"

"Don't worry, I actually like a person who can brazenly call herself 'beautiful and smart'."

Putting aside her noble bloodline, the current Empress was an "ordinary" girl. Consequently, this bred conflict. And conflict between women tended to be

of the insidious sort, staying out of plain sight. Unfortunately, the situation between Shiori and the Empress was no exception.

In the end, Shiori, who had relocated to the Suruga City, was abandoned and neglected by those at the imperial palace for a long time.

However, the Tokyo imperial palace finally sent a *messenger*.

They were finally willing to show some charity and extend a helping hand to rescue the poor princess from war-torn Tōkaidō—

November 13th, it was Thursday.

The messenger made a special visit to Rinzai High. Shiori chose to "have an audience" on campus, using the principal's office lent out by the school.

Behind the somewhat classy reception desk, Shiori met with the officer from the Imperial Guard.

"Thank you for traveling all the way out here for my sake."

"Not at all, Your Highness. I was supposed to hasten my way here to rescue you as soon as the incident broke out. Having dallied for over a month, all of us at the Imperial Guard are shamed beyond compare.—"

"Do not say that. Please raise your head."

The major from the Imperial Guard, the army that served the imperial family directly, bowed his head deeply in apology.

As an aide-de-camp of the imperial palace, he was acquainted with Shiori. Back in September this year, this soldier had accompanied her to attend the garden party held for Generalissimo Caesar.

Shiori said solemnly, "Hakone Checkpoint and various areas of Tōkaidō are still under the Restoration Alliance's control. You only managed to get here now due to Suruga City's emancipation. I know that the Imperial Guard is not at fault here."

These earnest words of understanding were also "false" platitudes.

If Staff Officer Yang, a Roman soldier, succeeded in breaking through the

blockade, there was no reason why soldiers of the Imperial Guard failed to do the same.

Bluntly stated, they did not have the slightest sincere intention of saving Shiori.

Meanwhile, the aide-de-camp changed the subject naturally.

"In any case, I am relieved to find you safe and sound, Your Highness."

The aide-de-camp's tone was filled with sincerity.

Presumably, he was not speaking against his conscience. The Imperial Guard had simply not taken actual action. As expected of an aide-de-camp, spending his days dealing with those aggravating ladies-in-waiting at the imperial palace, he had honed perfect skills in "professional customer service."

Using pleasing words, the major skillfully glossed over the Imperial Guard's negligence and incompetence.

In a way, this was part of his job too.

"Your Highness Shiori, Her Majesty Teruhime and the other members of the imperial family are eagerly awaiting your return. Should you wish to leave, I can make arrangements for you right away..."

Only now did an aide-de-camp arrive tardily.

At least he seemed sincere in bringing Shiori back, though it was not an "absolute" imperative. He had added a conditional at the end, contingent on Shiori's desire to return, meaning it was fine to leave her here too, since the princess still had House Akigase's protection, after all...

Someone in the Empress' inner circle must have given instructions to "handle it this way."

"I am truly overjoyed to learn of everyone's care and concern, but please forgive me for I must decline their kind wishes. In fact, I recently decided to *enter employment*."

"Enter... employment? Do you mean taking a job here in Suruga?"

"The details will be announced at the ceremony this coming weekend. Please

forgive my secrecy for now."

Shiori smiled gently and did not neglect to nip further questioning in the bud.

The ceremony to commemorate Akigase Shouzan's transfer of the family's headship to his beloved daughter was scheduled for the weekend. This was already common knowledge.

"But Your Highness, for an imperial princess to 'enter employment' without seeking the Imperial Household Agency's counsel, that would be quite unprecedented. It is my humble opinion that it would be prudent for you to first confer with the imperial palace."

"Be at ease. I have secured *Rindou-sensei*'s approval for this matter already."

Shiori smiled and brought up a name of extraordinary note.

The name worked like magic, instantly silencing the aide-de-camp. Observing this conversation from the back, Masatsugu quietly went "oh?" to himself.

For someone to wield such influence over a messenger from the imperial palace, Masatsugu was quite intrigued by this character this "Rindou-sensei."

"Is this alright with you, Masatsugu-sama?"

"What do you mean, Princess?"

"Today... Hatsune is not with us."

An hour after the meeting, Masatsugu was accompanying Princess Shiori on a stroll near Rinzai High.

Walking slightly ahead, Shiori seemed to be sulking a little. There was also a hint of sarcasm in her words just now.

"She went over to the tutelary fort. If you need her, should I give her a call?"

They were walking along a rural path on the outskirts of Suruga City.

Fortunately, wireless communications could be used normally now that noetic disruption was over.

All he needed to do was borrow a phone somewhere and call the Suruga tutelary fort, and Hatsune would rush over by car in about half an hour.

"M-Masatsugu, you fail to understand me!"

"Then what do you mean?"

"Uh, umm, Masatsugu-sama, it is fine if you wish to join her... If you prefer her company... That is simply what I am thinking," Shiori stammered.

Just earlier, she had handled an aide-de-camp with perfect composure, but her attitude now made her seem like a completely different person.

However, this too was part of Fujinomiya Shiori's nature as a person. She was not only a clever princess with ambitious goals, but also a shy and reserved maiden.

Her nature was so delicate that it was impossible for a coarse man like Tachibana Masatsugu to comprehend.

For the clever princess to be expressing her displeasure in such a manner, this indicated quite a serious emergency in a certain sense.

"Princess."

Masatsugu gazed at Shiori's beautiful face and said lightly, "I am merely someone who serves you—a person in the imperial princess' service. Fujinomiya Shiori's wellbeing and safety are my top priorities. Unless there is a particular necessity, I should remain by your side in preparation for the next battle"

"Remain by my side, you say?"

Masatsugu nodded, deliberately eschewing the use of words.

He stared at Shiori intently, causing the sulking princess to turn her head away shyly as though he had struck some kind of emotional chord.

"I-I am simply asking whether you were alright with not going along with Hatsune."

"Really?"

"Yes, Masatsugu-sama, I understand your loyalties without needing you to make such a solemn statement out of it."

There was still a sulking element in Shiori's voice, but the sarcastic tone had

gone.

Through a few words and subtle nuance, Masatsugu had cleared up a little of the displeasure in his lady liege's heart. *Perhaps it was time to change the subject*, he thought.

"May I ask what kind of person is Rindou-sensei... the one whom you brought up earlier, Princess?"

"Ah yes, I still have not told you, Masatsugu-sama," Shiori replied smoothly. "Having served the imperial family for many years, Rindou-sensei is a distinguished veteran with prominent accomplishments... Rather, she would be best described as one of the elder statesmen who helped the current imperial family come to power. She retired over ten years ago and is currently living an idyllic life near Suruga City."

I see.

A so-called elder statesman was someone who had rendered a great service to the nation. Masatsugu now had a preliminary understanding at last.

"So even after retirement, she still retains a certain level of influence, huh..."

"Yes, she not only watches over the descendants of House Fujinomiya but is also the mentor who instructed me in noetic control."

Noetic masters learned techniques in noetic control at specialized educational institutions.

However, it was highly improbable that Shiori would attend those kinds of facilities as an imperial princess. She had her own private instructor.

This Rindou-sensei was presumably an authority on noetic control at the imperial palace.

The Tachibana clan and Rindou-sensei all lived in and around Suruga. No wonder Princess Shiori had chosen to retire to this place.

"Based on what you've said, Princess... This Rindou-sensei must be quite old?"

The current imperial family had defeated the "southern court" of the Great Empire of Japan towards the end of the Second World War to become the rulers of Japan. This would be more than half a century ago. Logically speaking,

an "elder statesman" from that time would be quite old now—

"Yes, Sensei is definitely at least as old as Shouzan-sama."

"It might be rude for me to say this, but I'm surprised she's lived so long."

"Fufufufu. Sensei harbors numerous secrets. You will know when you meet her in the future. However—"

Shiori smiled suggestively then sighed.

"Sensei can be rather eccentric and I have no idea when I will have a chance to meet her again. Saying she has labored enough and weary of worldly matters, she has stayed home for a number of years and refused to go out. I was lying just now when I claimed to have received Sensei's approval."

"An elderly hermit, in other words."

"Yes... I suppose you could say that."

The princess was inexplicably vague. She took Masatsugu somewhere.

This was an elegant wooden building in a bamboo forest, reminiscent of a well-maintained Japanese inn.

Its name was Ryouzan Manor and was where Masatsugu and Shiori had their first "heart to heart" conversation.

Masatsugu noticed a case of twenty beers in front of the entrance along with domestic whiskey and several bottles of wine...

These were probably delivered from a liquor store or a supermarket?

"I have prepared many successive 'offerings' to invite Sensei, but unfortunately, she remains unmoved."

"Is this part of the offerings too?"

Masatsugu waved a bottle he was holding in his hand.

It contained *junmai daiginjou*, a type of premium sake brewed from pure rice. The label on the bottle featured a vibrant logo with the words "Special Selection, Lord Nanryuu."

At the princess' request, Hatsune had ordered this famous brand of sake from

a nearby liquor store.

The bottle had arrived yesterday after Suruga's blockade was lifted. The liquor store owner who made the delivery to the dorm even promised "This stuff is so rare that it's absolutely a phantom sake!"

Masatsugu's job today was transporting this bottle of sake.

Hence, he had been chatting with his lady liege while walking to Ryouzan Manor.

"And here I was thinking 'the princess is an alcoholic too' huh."

"I-I am still a minor! I have never imbibed any alcoholic beverage except for amazake. I specially ordered this brand because it is Sensei's favorite!"

"I see."

"The problem is that Sensei's 'favorite brands' number over a hundred. I am still far from completing the collection," said Shiori in distress.

This Rindou-sensei was evidently quite the drinker.

"It is time for Sensei to return to society and aid me. I really need the help now that a new Resurrectee has joined the Roman faction at Tokyo."

A few days ago, Staff Officer Yang had informed them of a certain name.

He was the newly appointed general of the Roman garrison in Kantō. His name was enough to surprise the well-learned princess, who never expected a man of such greatness to return to the human realm—

Part 2

"You don't know my name?"

"No, I was only asked to 'take the Roman army officer on a tour of the imperial palace' by Her Highness of House Fujinomiya..." Tachibana Genzou replied honestly when the guest asked curiously.

Genzou was Tachibana Hatsune's father and the steward of House Fujinomiya's Tokyo residence.

He was speaking to a handsome young man who had a gentle demeanor. The young man was East Asian with long hair. His slender eyes were awfully cool and refreshing. In other words, his was not the "thick and rugged" kind of face.

His well-proportioned facial features were not only calm but also beautiful.

Compared to this sort of "beauty," the massively built Tachibana Genzou was like a professional wrestler. With a bad guy's face covered by an overgrown beard, he seemed more like a bandit leader than a princess' retainer.

"Anyway, I will fulfill my mission of serving as your guide," promised Genzou, drawing upon his talent for taking things in stride.

Due to noetic disruption, he had not been able to reach the princess at Suruga for over a month.

Reportedly, his single daughter had inherited Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune during this period and Tachibana Masatsugu's power as a Resurrectee had also started to awaken. Last night, he finally received Princess Shiori's instructions for the first time in a while.

"Is this your first time at the imperial palace, sir?"

"Yes. To be honest, I am still uncomfortable with these kinds of places."

The two of them were currently at the Tokyo imperial palace.

This was the official residence Japan's head of state and the palace of Empress Teruhime, granddaughter of the sacred beast Lord Tenryuu. Genzou and his guest were walking along a passage.

"It's true that you don't look like a military man."

"People always say that, but I don't know why."

"Maybe it's to do with your clothing? No soldier would dress like this."

"Ah."

Genzou's observation made the handsome young man smile.

Instead of the Eastern Roman Empire's military uniform, the young man was wearing a robe—In other words, ancient Chinese attire. The hem reached down to his ankles with a pair of pants underneath.



It was as though he were a character who had been plucked out of a Chinese historical film.

"Even if you say you're not comfortable with this kind of place, sir, you seem perfectly capable of handling the head lady-in-waiting."

"Not really, all I did was greet her."

"You may not know this, sir, but those hags tend to nag too much. They could easily take offense from a careless greeting, creating trouble down the line."

Earlier, Genzou had visited the Imperial Household Agency.

His purpose was to meet this handsome young man. Despite not looking like a soldier, he was the newly appointed commander of the "Kantō Garrison of the Eastern Roman Imperial Army."

Ignorant of politics and military matters, nevertheless, these ladies-in-waiting always behaved and spoke as though they were superior to others.

However, the ladies-in-waiting had not been difficult for a change, greeting this young soldier rather cordially. The reason was most likely because this courteous and handsome man's face, comportment, and figure were all "perfect and first-rate."

"The inability of ladies to understand men's work hasn't changed in the modern age, huh."

"The way you say that, sir, don't tell me you're also one of those... Resurrected from the past?"

Genzou's question was intended as a probing test.

Unexpectedly, the young man introduced himself straight away, making him jump in surprise.

"Indeed, my name is Wei Qing. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

"....."

"Eh, what's the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing. I thought it might be improper to ask for your name, but you ended up introducing yourself so readily. That's quite surprising," Genzou

shared his thoughts honestly, switching from his coarse usage of polite forms to a more casual tone.

Meanwhile, the handsome young man, who bore the Chinese Appellation of Wei Qing, smiled.

"It's fine. My reputation is nothing special, after all. I suppose you have no idea what kind of man Wei Qing was, right?"

"Uh, let me see, how do I put this?"

"See, that's the extent of my reputation. I'm sure the soldiers under my command will feel very troubled."

Unfazed by Tachibana Genzou's awkward response, the ancient warrior smiled.

Wei Qing. Genzou had some recollection of this name, probably from a history textbook.

However, Genzou was a Japanese man whose knowledge of history was rather rusty.

Asking someone like him to recall Wei Qing's life in detail—would be absolutely impossible.

"But modern warfare is fought by Legions instead of human soldiers. I'm quite relieved that I don't need to worry about matters on that front," The handsome Resurrectee named Wei Qing whispered casually.

Several hours later, Tachibana Genzou was reading a history book after finishing his work.

He wanted to know who exactly was "General Wei Qing."

According to historical records, Wei Qing was a soldier during the Western Han Dynasty, around 110 BCE. The ruler he served as general was Emperor Wu, who had punished the historian Sima Qian with castration. His campaigns against equestrian nomads won him great acclaim.

However, his origins were quite humble.

Wei Qing herded sheep in his childhood and was treated no better than a slave.

In time, he would rise to the rank of generalissimo and attain the highest honors of the state—

Part 3

In the land of Hakone, four tutelary forts had been built at the four cardinal directions.

The first tutelary fort was Seiryuu Gate in the east. This fort was several kilometers from Hakone Yumoto, a hot spring town located at the entrance of Hakone when traveling from Tokyo.

The second tutelary fort in the south and the third tutelary fort in the west were both located near Lake Ashi.

Lake Ashi was the largest body of water in the vast area of southern Hakone. The second tutelary fort, Suzaku Gate, was on its south shore while the third tutelary fort, Byakko Gate, was on the west shore.

The fourth tutelary in the north, Genbu Gate, was situated at Sengokuhara in northern Hakone.

In other words, the land of Hakone had four strongholds, guarding the directions of north, east, south, and west respectively.

The British aristocrat who had captured Hakone, Edward, muttered to himself, "Using the Legions and ifrits at the four tutelary forts to erect a 'wall' to protect Kantō and Tokyo from attacks originating in western Japan... That seems to be the aim."

"Yes. This is Hakone Checkpoint's concept, indeed."

The genie Morrigan in his company nodded. She was possessing her usual doll, 150cm tall and dressed in a sailor outfit with a beret.

"The idea itself is sound, but ultimately, I mobilized an army surpassing *the total forces of the four tutelary forts* and attacked, easily capturing Hakone."

Edward and the genie Morrigan were at the central command center.

This was where the "supreme commander of the Hakone tutelary forts" used to be stationed to issue orders to the tutelary forts in the four cardinal directions. It was also located right in the center point between the four tutelary forts of Hakone.

In terms of geographic names, this was a plain near Komagatake.

"In my opinion, this isn't truly 'impregnable.' Ultimately, the fortress itself lacks the defensive strength to resist an invasion of a thousand Legions... That is the long and short of it."

"I, agree. I expect some of the Japanese, to feel the same."



"All things considered, it boils down to this mechanism of the Four Gods Union."

The central command center did not have fortification walls.

It was simply composed of four towers of stone, built on a wide open plain.

The architectural design was essentially uniform. Like the nation-protecting keeps of tutelary forts, these forty-meter all towers used red bricks as the construction material. The four towers were arranged in a rhombus.

Riding a British white wyvern together, Edward and Morrigan were flying over the four towers.

In charge of controlling the wyvern, Edward said, "Hakone's four tutelary forts can combine each fort's guardian ifrit, respectively Seiryuu, Suzaku, Byakko, and Genbu, into one monster with four times the noetic energy..."

"Furthermore, the merged entity can defend all four tutelary forts, north, east, south, west, simultaneously."

"Yes, an amazing system."

After offering praise together, the British aristocrat and Morrigan shook their heads.

"But this assumes the successful activation of the system. Had they activated it during my attack, Hakone would not have fallen so easily."

"It seems that Japan... lacks the competency required to tame this, monster," Morrigan remarked coldly.

"What they lack is a genie capable of controlling the Four Gods, the entity resulting from the union of Seiryuu, Suzaku, Byakko, and Genbu. The genie in this role also requires powerful noesis from a supreme Chevalier as support..."

"Morrigan, since you have said this much," Edward smiled and said, "then our partnership should not face any problems, right?"

"Indeed. It is not impossible. Especially since you have minimized your sorties for the past half a month, Prince, conserving substantial noesis..."

"Yes, all of it for the purpose of acquiring the Four Gods."

The night of Fuji City's capture...

Edward did not head out to the front line and ended up forfeiting the chance for a showdown against Tachibana Masatsugu.

This was because they were planning to hold the ritual for subjugating the Four Gods soon. And now, the two of them were flying in the sky over the four towers.

Riding the wyvern, Edward said slowly, "Proceed, Morrigan. Use my noesis to subjugate the Four Gods."

"Affirmative."

After the genie nodded, gigantic eyeballs manifested in the sky.

...It was what Tachibana Masatsugu and company had witnessed at the Fuji tutelary fort, a giant eyeball with a diameter of sixty meters or so. In this case, there was not one but a total of three. Three eyes.

The three giant eyeballs were arranged in a triangle in the air.

This was precisely Morrigan's true form, the image of the ifrit Morgan le Fay. Behind the three giant eyeballs, an equally large magic circle appeared.

"Prince, please."

"Shame be to him who thinks ill of it—Calling upon my name and soul, I beseech the local deities and spirits of Hakone. Abandon your home country of Japan and surrender to my army. I am Edward the Black Prince, the foremost knight of the British Empire and the undefeated general!"

Edward released an inordinate amount of noetic energy from his body and soul.

Normally, this energy would transform into a thousand and two hundred Knights of the Garter, but today, not a single black knight appeared.

All of the noesis was absorbed by the *three eyes* hovering in the sky!

Immediately, the noesis exuding from the British ifrit was amplified three-fold.

"O deities of Japan, recognize me, Morrigan, as your master. Obey this

instant."

A change came over the four towers built by the Japanese on this Hakone plain.

Four giant beasts manifested in the sky over the roofs of the four towers.

Each beast was seventy meters or so in body length. Featuring translucent bodies, they were images without corporeal form.

The four beasts were respectively a blue dragon, a vermilion phoenix, a white tiger, and a black turtle (with a snake for a tail).

These were the holy beasts, Seiryuu, Suzaku, Byakko, and Genbu, known collectively as the Four Gods in China and Japan.

Morgan le Fay's *three eyes* continued to hover in the air.

Overlooking the towers and the Four Gods, the *three eyes* sucked away the gigantic beasts of Japan!

Seiryuu, Suzaku, Byakko, and Genbu moved away from the roofs of the towers and gradually rose up in the sky.

The *three eyes* watched carefully. The Four Gods of Japan released noetic energy and tried to resist Morgan le Fay's suction.

However, the *three eyes* had taken in Edward's noesis. The Four Gods were no match at all.

...First of all, the desperately resisting image of Seiryuu lost. Gradually approaching the *three eyes*, it was finally absorbed into them.

One after another, the same happened to the rest of them.

Second to go was Genbu, then Byakko, and finally Suzaku.

"The central command center is a mystical device granted by the sacred beast Lord Tenryuu to merge the Four Gods of the four cardinal directions... It can be thought of as Hakone's fifth tutelary fort, isn't that right?"

"Yes, Prince."

"And until now, it never had a chance to fulfill its function."

"Yes, we of the British, shall change this fact of history."

Treacherous and unforgiving, featuring an abundance of towering peaks and abyssal valleys...

This was how people described the mountains of Hakone back in the age before motorized transportation. This place had been a natural choke point since time immemorial and now it was made even more impregnable.

"With this... We are now fully prepared to meet the Tōkaidō army in battle."

"Quite rare to see you so motivated, Morrigan."

"They have stolen *that* which I had left behind at Fuji City. This is revenge."

Calm and cool, the genie was full of fight as the day of reckoning approached. Satisfied, Edward nodded in approval of Morrigan.

"Edward, my younger brother's descendant. It is my turn to take on the duty of defending Hakone."

The man who proposed this solemnly was Richard I, the one whom Edward called "Uncle."

The British forces had requisitioned a luxury hotel (a cozy and stylish building) in Hakone as Edward's living quarters. The top leaders had gathered at this hotel for a war council.

It was around 7pm on November 13th.

During the daytime, Edward and Morrigan had subjugated the Four Gods at the central command center.

"As the commander-in-chief, you should return to Kinai where it will be easier to handle matters in the newly conquered Nagoya and respond to the Roman fleet advancing on Kyoto from the Sea of Japan."

"Isn't that the job I assigned you a few days ago, Uncle?"

Edward immediately rejected the Lionheart's opinion.

Originally, this forefather of the Plantagenet family was not invited to this meeting. The Lionheart had barged in two hours earlier on his own accord.

Attendees included the spirit Morrigan and trusted subordinates such as the elderly Lieutenant Colonel Grayson.

"Nagoya is yours, Uncle, while I handle the Kantō side of things. That was the plan. There is no need to alter our approach at this point. We agreed on this from the start."

"Quit mouthing nonsense in my presence. What you want is to keep the upcoming battle for your own personal enjoyment, am I right!?"

Richard's voice was deep and rich, but the words were no different from those of a child throwing a tantrum.

Edward smiled calmly and said, "Indeed you are right, Uncle, but you have no grounds to complain. Who asked you to defy orders and come back in defeat?"

"Grr!" Richard was silenced by Edward's veiled assertion that this was his deserved punishment.

"Furthermore, Uncle, the death of your thousand-odd Escalibors would require two or three weeks for your army to recover. Please remain obediently at Kyoto."

"Grrrrrrr."

Normally, revival of Legions killed outside of their stronghold would take one to two weeks.

However, that only applied to the Legions under ordinary Chevaliers whose Chevalier Strength ranged from thirty or forty up to two hundred or so.

Resurrectees with a Chevalier Strength over a thousand had to spend even more time to revive their Legions.

"Besides, Uncle, you made an excellent point. We need to increase vigilance over the sea. According to reports... Lord Caesar and his knightly fleet are showing signs of mobilizing."

"...Oh?"

"It is unknown whether they intend to cross the Sea of Japan to head straight for Kyoto, or come in from the Pacific side. Either way, we must not be careless."

"Hmph, it is not like I hate staying at Nagoya."

Imposing yet childish at times, the Lionheart finally cheered up.

However, he still could not hide his disappointment.

"I heard that the Roman garrison in Tokyo has made new movements. Tōkaidō's samurai have constructed a new system centered in Suruga and *that man* will definitely invade Hakone."

"Who are you referring to, Uncle?"

"Quit playing dumb. Of course I mean Tachibana Masatsugu."

"Prince, Your Highness, may I speak on this subject?"

"Yes, go ahead, Grayson."

"Tachibana Masatsugu... There is apparently a rumor circulating among the officers and soldiers of Tōkaidō. Everyone is calling him the 'Last Samurai' and 'defender of the imperial family,' Hijikata Toshizō."

Lieutenant Colonel Grayson gave off an air more akin to a rigid old gentleman than a soldier.

Edward nodded to acknowledge what he had said.

In fact, Edward had received similar reports. Hijikata Toshizō had served as the second-in-command of the Shinsengumi special police force whose activities were mainly in Kyoto (reportedly quite an unbelievable organization which had more members die in internal purges than were killed fighting external enemies).

A master swordsman who had wielded the same samurai blade as what Tachibana Masatsugu was now using—

However, Edward had his own interpretation.

"Is Tachibana-dono truly Hijikata Toshizō...?"

"Do you have doubts, Your Highness?"

"He definitely carries the 'samurai sword' as a conspicuous signboard, but putting that aside... Would this sort of island nation be able to nurture a man like him?"

"Oh?" Richard was skeptical while Grayson seemed slightly surprised.

"What we need to consider," Edward continued, "are Tachibana Masatsugu's characteristics as a strategist and tactician."

"Firstly, feints and ambushes are his specialty."

The genie Morrigan instantly offered her answer.

She must have been pondering the issue ever since hearing her superior wonder "perhaps Tachibana-dono isn't actually a samurai."

Edward smiled and said, "Precisely, Morrigan. However, that is not the complete picture."

"He employs his army in swift and bold maneuvers. His blatant disregard of soldier exhaustion borders on negligence, yet troop movements are always orderly."

"Impressive, your opinion is not far from mine. Surely an island nation of this sort, all covered with mountains, cannot hone tactics of this sort, right? I believe that vast open plains on the continent are more likely..."

"In other words, Edward," Uncle Richard frowned and said, "It is your belief that Tachibana Masatsugu is not Japanese?"

"We should review this possibility."

"Hard to say. I have also heard legends of Minamoto no Yoshitsune. Isn't he a talented cavalry commander and the pride of Japan? More importantly..."

The Lionheart snorted and declared loudly.

"Since I am the knight of knights, it would be best if my opponent is a samurai of the Far East. Hence, I place my faith in Tachibana Masatsugu being a pure Japanese samurai."

"Hahahaha, Uncle, it is perfectly fine for you to think that."

Richard I was a "war genius."

Without any need for logic or calculations, he was able to win victories simply through instinct and passion alone.

For someone with his rare talents, the true identity of the enemy was virtually

irrelevant to victory. Edward smiled cheerfully and reminisced about a past enemy.

"Du Guesclin..."

"Prince, you just mentioned the Constable of France, yes? A contemporary of yours."

Morrigan had picked up on Edward's muttering.

"Yes, speaking of him—I wouldn't really consider him a worthy rival. However, he was quite skilled in war with excellent use of feints and ambushes, perhaps even better than Tachibana-dono."

Du Guesclin was a knight born in Brittany.

Back then, under the leadership of Black Prince Edward and his father, England had gained an overwhelming upper hand in their war against France. Against such odds, du Guesclin had emerged to support young king of France, Charles V.

That being said, he never confronted the Black Prince in a glamorous pitched battle.

Avoiding direct confrontations against the English army as much as possible, he inflicted steady losses on the English repeatedly through ingenious ambushes and swift retreats.

Du Guesclin was undoubtedly the most difficult French general to deal with in that era.

However, he had not exhibited the audacity and lightning offensives frequently used by Tachibana Masatsugu.

"The great conflict between us and France from back then is now known as the Hundred Years' War, isn't it? To be perfectly honest, I personally believe that du Guesclin was the true hero of that war instead of the rumored girl named Jeanne d'Arc. The difference in their talent and contributions is as great as night and day."

"According to my search..." The maiden doll in the sailor outfit said indifferently, "The reason why du Guesclin is overlooked is most likely due to

his unimpressive appearance."

"Ah... Well, I suppose it would not be wrong to call him an ugly man."

Edward was a bit taken aback by the conversation's turn to the subject of appearance.

"He was rather obese and was derogatorily known as the 'pig'."

"Well... That is how the world works. Compared to someone like him, the crowd prefers a 'tragic maiden.' After all, fiction can arbitrarily depict her as a beauty."

"Your opinion is rather harsh, but accurate," the genie's upfront remark brought a wry smile to Edward's face.

After that, Edward turned his gaze to the only *human maiden* at the meeting.

"By the way, I heard that Suruga has a princess descended from a sacred beast's bloodline. Similar to how you are the beloved daughter of the Three Lions, she is the granddaughter of Lord Tenryuu..."

"This I know, good brother."

Aware that she was not a soldier, the beautiful maiden had refrained from speaking until now.

She was Princess Eleanor. Like Imperial Japan, the British Empire maintained a policy of secrecy regarding their royal family. Hence, she too was not a princess known to the general public.

She was blessed with beautiful blonde hair and a gorgeous face.

"Fujinomiya Shiori—a princess of Imperial Japan, isn't that right?"

"Yes, you are very informed."

Eleanor possessed a number of abilities akin to a "witch's" and had used them to great effect at Kyoto and Suruga City. Edward had great faith in her intelligence too.

As a result, Edward had also assigned a job to her.

"So, could you kindly report on the matter?"

"Yes... During the Second World War, the islands of Japan were for the most part controlled by the 'southern court' of the Great Empire of Japan. The sacred beast worshiped by the southern court at the time was Ōkuninushi. The current imperial family's precursor, the 'northern court,' only held Hokkaido back then."

After recounting history in her lovely voice, Eleanor turned to the heart of the matter.

"The mission of locating the body of the sealed Ōkuninushi and the resurrected Japanese warriors from that time... I have mobilized the Kinai Fiefdom's resources to conduct this search."

"Understood. Ladies and gentlemen, the other sacred beast of Japan is Lord Tenryuu," Edward addressed the group, "which it is imperative for us to secure. I believe you are all aware that our Three Lions do not have long to live. We must do our utmost in the land of the Far East, or else the British Empire shall no longer have a sacred beast within her borders."

Part 4

November 15th, it was Saturday and the weekend had arrived.

"It's amazing how much the situation has changed in merely a week. Even though Nagoya fell, Suruga City is finally liberated and we even got a new Tōkaidō Governor General," Okonogi Taisei commented with poignancy.

Masatsugu said to him, "Until we retake Nagoya, Suruga will be the temporary provincial capital."

"So a temporary provincial government will be set up in Suruga City, huh? Totally inconceivable half a year ago," Hatsune expressed her own feelings on the matter.

The trio was in a commercial district near Suruga Station, in front of a scramble intersection.

Such a metropolitan neighborhood was rare to find in this quiet regional city. Trendy buildings were abundant with giant television screens.

Normally, these screens would display advertisements for local businesses or commercial events.

Masatsugu and friends stopped walking to look up at the screen. It was airing the "inauguration of the new Governor General of Tōkaidō."

"The new Governor General visited our school before, right?"

"That's right, her name is Akigase Rikka-sama. We're on pretty good terms with her."

"Taisei, her caliber is impeccable too."

"Well, I'm not in any position to comment on that... Say, she's got quite an amazing face and figure. I think she'll be very popular with both genders."

Rikka's gallant standing figure was visible on the giant screen.

She was dressed in a black military officer's uniform with the treasured sword Onikiri Yasutsuna hanging on her belt in its scabbard. She was also wearing a black military hat today, making her appearance even more perfect than usual.

The ceremony was being held at a Shinto shrine.

The venue was Mount Kunou Tōshōgū near the Suruga tutelary fort.

Like Nikkō Tōshōgū, this was an ancient Shinto shrine with a deep connection to Tokugawa Ieyasu. It was situated on the pinnacle of Mount Kunou. The Tōkaidō Fiefdom's top officials and civilian big shots were gathered on its premises to celebrate Rikka succeeding to the position of Governor General.

Former Governor General Akigase Shōzan was also present.

The camera rarely focused on him, but frequently provided closeups of Rikka.

In other words, this television program was intended to promote the new Governor General, Akigase Rikka.

The inauguration event had been edited by a television station in Suruga City to become news footage, then broadcast to the surrounding region through the city's telecommunications facilities.

The various parts of Tōkaidō territory currently captured by the Restoration Alliance could also receive the signal.

For example, this included the Izu Peninsula, Kakegawa, Hamamatsu, and even around Nagoya— This was done to inform residents that "the Tōkaidō Fiefdom was still alive," thereby sustaining cohesion and preventing the populace from leaning too much over to the Restoration Alliance.

This was the true purpose of producing this program.

"The princess also said that the people in areas conquered by the Restoration Alliance are currently waiting to see whether the Restoration Alliance wins or the Tōkaidō Fiefdom makes a comeback... But before long, they'll gradually give up on Tōkaidō."

"Yeah, I hear that a lot," Taisei agreed with Hatsune's comment.

"In the cities whose tutelary forts have fallen, the residents will start

cooperating with the conquerors mentally and economically. Nowadays, under the Charter of Chivalry's protection, residents can't really be expected to show a high degree of loyalty to the nation," Taisei added somewhat pessimistically. "But ultimately, the Restoration Alliance is the British Empire's lapdog. There'll be hell to pay if anyone forgets that. Like the incident ten years ago when the new Empress Teruhime came to power but actually follows Rome's will."

Taisei's tone was laid back, but there was a slight element of criticism in his words.

His father worked in the news industry and Taisei also held a part-time job at the same company. Masatsugu's friend, Okonogi Taisei was a social-minded patriot.

To such a friend, Masatsugu said, "Perhaps the establishment of deep ties between the princess and the Tōkaidō Fiefdom will come to hold great significance eventually. Don't forget this either."

"I'm quite surprised by this turn of events, actually. I never thought Princess Shiori would become a Saiguu at Tōkaidō."

Onscreen, the Shinto priests and shrine maidens of Mount Kunou Tōshougū were carrying out a ceremony.

At the forefront was a striking young beauty.

The girl was wearing a Heian-style juunihitoe and a tiara with her platinum blonde hair let down today...

She was Fujinomiya Shiori, the liege of Masatsugu and others.

Her otherworldly appearance was combined with this attire.

Every time she was caught on camera, the television screen was enhanced with overwhelming beauty.

"The princess is a noble who had inherited dragon blood from Lord Tenryū. She possesses outstanding spiritual powers far beyond what commoners like us could ever hope for." Masatsugu said quietly, "That's why the Tōkaidō Fiefdom recruited the princess and asked her to serve as Mount Kunou's shrine maiden."

"That's right, that's right. She will serve as the shrine maiden who receives

divine oracles to offer advice to Governor General Rikka-sama. Isn't that such a great idea?"

Masatsugu and Hatsune were explaining "Shiori's reason for entering employment."

One could very well call this a pretext, but the princess definitely possessed outstanding spiritual powers and was the new Governor General's indispensable adviser.

These were not lies but Taisei was a bit puzzled.

"But isn't the so-called Saiguu supposed to be 'the imperial princess who serves the gods at the Ise Grand Shrine'? Since Princess Shiori is a shrine maiden at Mount Kunou... Wouldn't it be better to pick a different title?"

"Don't sweat this kind of small stuff."

"Rikka-sama also said 'it is better to keep it simple' and even 'since it is a position that was abolished centuries ago, it would be ridiculous to get hung up on every detail'."

"Should I call the new Governor General sloppy or decisive...?"

"The opposite would be far worse. A neurotic ruler is definitely not good for the country."

While they were talking, the ceremony continued steadily onscreen.

In truth, this video was not a live broadcast but a rerun of the event at 9am.

The same program should be airing on the televisions of ordinary households too.

The current time was 12:45, already past noon.

For the Suruga residents out in the streets, this was no longer news, but many people still stood to watch.

The reason was simple. Two beautiful girls shown together onscreen.

Rikka in military uniform was solemn and dignified.

The princess in juunihitoe was in a word, divine.

Both of them made such striking impressions that a single glance was enough to produce lasting memories.

Putting complicated reasons aside, the two of them definitely made quite an impact. This was thanks to the "glamor" of these two maidens and the magical power of the medium known as television.

(In fact, Shiori was wearing *a non-standard juunihitoe with reduced fabric to allow her to walk unaided* but anyway, it was no big deal.) The camera was mostly focused on Shiori and Rikka.

In terms of screen time, the proportion was something like "40% new Governor General, 30% princess, and 30% everyone else."

"But what surprised me the most was *this* shot," Taisei pointed at the giant screen and remarked.

Unbelievably, next to the two noble beauties was *Tachibana Masatsugu*.

The Masatsugu onscreen was wearing his usual stiff-collar uniform with a military officer's overcoat on top. Instead of the black one he wore before, his overcoat was light blue in color except for the lapels and sleeves which were white.

A sheathed Japanese sword—the materialized Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada—was hanging at his waist...

A scrolling ticker at the bottom of the screen read:

'The knight in Princess Shiori's service, Lord Tachibana Masatsugu, is officially assuming his post as the Vice-Commander of the Shinsengumi, a newly created order of special operative knights, and taking command of the Tōkaidō knights —'

'Furthermore, the post of commander of this order is currently left vacant. Princess Shiori is expected to assume leadership as acting commander for the interim—'

The figure shown on the giant television was identical to the Masatsugu standing on a street corner.

Dressed in a light-blue overcoat on top of his stiff-collar student uniform,

wearing a sword, he was standing there with a cool expression on his face. This attire was very conspicuous and attracted attention from many pedestrians. They looked at the live Masatsugu in amazement and compared him to the one on the giant screen.

Some people even stared at them and whispered among themselves.

These type of reactions were only going to increase from now on, so getting bothered would be pointless. To Masatsugu who was unfazed by his surroundings, his friend said in exasperation, "Why on earth did you have to meet me dressed like this...?"

"Don't mind me. I still have to go back and take part in the ceremony later and changing is too much of a hassle."

"You should be more mindful. But what a weird squad you have there. Why are you called the vice-commander when you're clearly the actual commanding officer? Her Highness Shiori's position of acting commander is simply honorary, right?"

How astute of Taisei. Masatsugu nodded and said, "You're right. Of course, I can't keep commanding the Tōkaidō provincial army as 'a knight in the princess' service' so that's why we set up an arbitrary squad and official post."

"By the way, I'm the captain of the first unit, even though there's only one unit and I'm the sole member♪"

"That's so Shinsengumi. But Masatsugu-kun, I heard a weird rumor."

"What rumor?"

"Everyone is saying your real identity is Hijikata Toshizō."

Masatsugu and Hatsune did not respond.

The purpose of naming the squad Shinsengumi and setting Masatsugu's post as the vice-commander was to reinforce the rumor. The Tōkaidō Fiefdom had decided to borrow the hero's name to enhance Tachibana Masatsugu's authority and reputation.

However, the friend who knew Masatsugu well had his doubts.

"Don't mind it. After all, it's easy for weird rumors to start during wartime."

"Is that really it?"

"Yeah. By the way, I'd like to sit down with you for a discussion about the school festival and the beauty contest. Just a little longer, and I'll be free enough to go to school. Remember to make time for it."

"You never change, Masatsugu-kun. So, by 'a while,' you mean—"

"Just as you suspect, I'll be extremely busy in the near future."

Masatsugu patted the hilt of Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada.

The showdown against Edward the Black Prince was drawing near and it was time for the trenchant blade to enter the stage.

"This is unbearable," Rikka murmured quietly. Only the princess beside her could hear her.

"Under the camera all the time, it is so uncomfortable."

"Be that as it may, Rikka-sama, you look honestly majestic... This has been an excellent inauguration. After this, things will be easier to deal with in various ways."

"Credit is definitely owed to you on this regard, Your Highness."

Princess Shiori praised Rikka, who smiled wryly in return.

Starting in the morning and continuing into the afternoon, the ceremony was winding down. They were currently having a "parade" in the city.

Together with her inner circle, the new Governor General was making rounds in Suruga City.

Naturally, they were not moving on foot. Instead, a double-decker bus served this purpose. The top story of the bus had no roof, making it a kind of open car. Due to traffic restrictions in Suruga City, the bus was able to move steadily through the roads without impediment, escorted by security vehicles on the side.

Rikka was standing at the center of the bus' top story, the most conspicuous location.

Dressed up in juunihitoe, Princess Shiori stood beside her.

This positioning was designed for PR purposes. The two girls smiled cheerfully at the citizens on the roadside, waving from time to time.

The whole show was intended to drum up a glamorous and lively atmosphere for the "new Governor General's inauguration."

Everywhere, the bus was greeted by crowds of Suruga residents cheering.

There were many people who had come in from the surrounding region too. Everything looked "joyous" on the surface, but considering the difficult situation facing the Tōkaidō Fiefdom, this was "mere bravado."

Nevertheless, this was good enough.

Having the energy to tend to matters of appearance was proof that they were not pushed to the edge.

(That reminds me, we are currently stuck in quite a troublesome position...)

Looking out at the Suruga streets from the bus, Rikka thought to herself.

The invading Restoration Alliance was not the only problem. The eastern Japanese fiefdoms have proven completely unreliable despite being fellow compatriots of Imperial Japan. However, if Tōkaidō were to depend on the Eastern Roman Empire as an ally, the great hero Caesar would "take over."

Amid the desperate situation, there were several elements for optimism.

The forsaken princess next to her, Fujinomiya Shiori, was served by a mysterious Resurrectee. She herself was also highly insightful and blessed with outstanding spiritual powers.

Purely from the perspective of a general, one would be hard pressed to find better talent than hers.

Unfortunately, in the ensuing game of power against either the Japanese imperial family or the various surrounding nations, it was impossible to say whether her highborn blood would prove to be a blessing or a curse...

Shiori was an unfathomable joker card, impossible to predict.

Under normal circumstances, such a card should never be retained in one's

hand.

However, the Tōkaidō Fiefdom was currently in no position to pick and choose. Furthermore, there was Tachibana Masatsugu, an exceptional being known as a Resurrectee and reminiscent of her revered Hijikata Toshizō...

(Looks like all I can do is take a gamble.)

Rikka smiled to herself. She had no choice but to go all-in before all was lost. Ordinary measures were not going to reverse the unfavorable tide.

"Your Highness, I have already heard the gist of your strategy."

Rikka lowered her voice again so that only the princess next to her could hear.

"On the matter of Hakone, let us proceed as you have suggested."

"Is that so? Then—"

"Indeed, we will join forces with the Resurrectee whom Rome stationed in Tokyo and attack Hakone Checkpoint simultaneously from the east and the west. We of Tōkaidō will take control of the Hakone region on behalf of the incompetent Kantō Fiefdom and imperial palace officials..."

At this moment, the two of them reached a consensus.

They were not only going to expel the Restoration Alliance from Tōkaidō but also stage their own uprising, turning this crisis into an opportunity.

"Simply defeating the foes at hand will not solve the problem at the root. We might as well subjugate Kantō and Tokyo in one move to become Imperial Japan's number one faction—Indeed, it is futile unless we accomplish this much," Rikka declared quietly in a voice only audible to the princess.

Part 5

That evening, after Akigase Rikka succeeded to her father's position...

The inauguration ceremony had run its course without issue, but not all events were over.

Relevant individuals were invited to a hotel in Suruga City to attend a party known as a convivial gathering.

However, the main stars for today had yet to arrive.

They were gathered at the center of the Suruga tutelary fort, on the roof of the forty-meter tall nation-protecting keep.

This included Akigase Rikka, Fujinomiya Shiori, Tachibana Masatsugu, and one more person.

"Oh my, Your Highness got changed?"

"Mobility is too restrictive in that attire, after all."

"What a shame. His Excellency has a great liking for that. He'll definitely be disappointed that he cannot see it *in the flesh*."

This exchange was taking place between Shiori and Alexis Yang.

From an etiquette standpoint, Staff Officer Yang's behavior was highly inadvisable. He lacked clear respect for an allied nation's imperial princess, but not to the point of being annoying or infuriating.

Staff Officer Yang was presumably the type who made friends easily anywhere around the world.

His talent as a staff officer were unknown, but he was definitely a "useful" employee. In addition, he was a noetic master.

At this moment, Yang whistled.

The aquila retainer beast flying around the nation-protecting keep's roof—a giant eagle with a wingspan of four meters—squawked acutely in response.

"This is the fruit of my labors after possessing the retainer beast with my consciousness and making a special trip to Hong Kong. Behold, everyone."

No sooner had he spoken than a change occurred to Yang's body.

The outline of the ethnic Chinese and citizen of Eastern Rome in a military uniform gradually blurred and disappeared. Thirty seconds later, the blurry figure took on a new appearance.

It was a middle-aged man, dressed in the military attire of ancient Rome.

Staff Officer Yang had suddenly "transformed."

"Hello, Shiori. Been a while, hasn't it? The last I saw of you was at the garden party in Tokyo."

The middle-aged man smiled cheerfully, greeting her gallantly.

Masatsugu was secretly impressed. The man was eloquent and had a pleasing voice. Right of the bat, one could tell he was a first-rate orator.

Shiori walked over to him and bowed her head politely as a greeting.

"Yes, it has been a while. I apologize for my lapse in keeping touch, especially when Your Excellency has always taken special care of me."

"You are very welcome. Given our relationship, there is no need for you to be shy."

The man gave off an incredible impression. Although his hair was thinning out and he was not particularly tall in stature...

His face was well-proportioned while retaining an air of dignity and cordiality — "You should be well aware that I, Julius Caesar, am a champion for the ladies and an arrogant knave who makes fools out of other men. How could a couple of months' absence possibly dent our friendship?"

In his distinctive manner of speaking, the man introduced his name.

Caesar was the man whose name became cognate to "emperor." A rare conqueror from history was now standing before Masatsugu's eyes.

...This was probably a miracle made possible by noetics.

Receiving the noesis from the great generalissimo in distant Hong Kong, Alexis Yang summoned Julius Caesar's astral projection to the land of Suruga to possess his body...

Who would have thought that even appearances could change?

Masatsugu was deeply impressed.

Caesar spoke to the other beauty present, "Greetings to you, Governor General of Tōkaidō. I have had the pleasure of meeting your father on a number of occasions, but tonight is our first encounter... To be honest, not only is this a blessing for public wellbeing but I am personally also very pleased."

Turning to Akigase Rikka, Caesar smiled cordially.

"I am well aware of the Suruga tutelary fort's valiant efforts and predicament. Rising to the occasion as the Governor General in a time of crisis definitely demonstrates extraordinary military talent and ability. Furthermore, you are a beautiful young maiden, which makes you a potential ally whom I could not welcome more."

Praising the beauty of ladies at every opportunity, perhaps this was one of Caesar's talents.

In addition, he extended his right hand, trying to enact the ancient Roman custom of "handshaking." This shameless move was surprisingly fitting for the man named Caesar.

Rikka smiled wryly and shook hands, apparently thinking the same thing.

However, Rikka had prepared her own agenda, as expected of House Akigase's Chevalier princess.

"By alliance, you are alluding to a concerted attack on Hakone from the east and the west, aren't you?"

"Naturally, it extends beyond Hakone. Since the problem has arisen, we should all cooperate until the rebellion of the Restoration Alliance is taken care of."

"We of Tōkaidō would be extremely grateful for that."

"To be honest, I would like to stay longer in Suruga, but this noetic technique is most likely cannot be sustained for too long. Nevertheless, in two week's time... No, ten days, I shall be able to return to Japan. I am already making arrangements on this front."

Caesar promised with his hand on his chest.

"While I am still here, let us have a good discussion on how to conquer Hakone."

"On this subject... We believe it would be best if we were to capture Hakone before your arrival, Your Excellency."

"Oh? Meaning I don't get a chance to be under the spotlight?"

"I have heard Her Highness Shiori recount Your Excellency's siege methods from the Gallic Wars. However—"

In various siege battles in the past, Caesar had demonstrated extraordinary use of strategy and tactics.

Through clever deployment of the Roman army, he captured castles and fortresses one after another despite attacking defensive forces far greater than his own in numbers. Rikka said to this siege expert, "I believe it would be for the best if Julius Caesar did not enter the stage."

"Would you care to elaborate?"

"It is exceedingly simple, Your Excellency. It would take you at least ten days before you stepped foot in Japan. If we were to waste such a lengthy amount of time, I fear the sleeping lion shall rise again."

Tachibana Masatsugu had defeated Richard the Lionheart.

Currently, that impulsive man was laying low simply because he lacked troops.

By the time Caesar arrived in Japan after ten days—The Escalibors would have recovered almost completely, which was why Rikka had suggested a quick offensive.

Naturally, taking precautions against the Lionheart was only a pretext. Rikka had ulterior considerations too.

The true motive was that the credit of capturing Hakone must not go to Caesar alone.

"Hmm..."

Caesar gazed at Rikka. He was not only a womanizer but also a hero and strategist with a lifetime of experience.

He must have seen through the Tōkaidō Fiefdom's calculations in no time at all. Still—Masatsugu was quite confident.

Caesar was not going to refuse this suggestion.

The fact that he had sent his direct staff officer to them indicated that he believed the Tōkaidō Fiefdom had value to offer, especially the rare talents of the personnel at Suruga. Most importantly, news of Tachibana Masatsugu had already reached his ears...

"Governor General... No, may I address you as Rikka-dono?" Caesar asked unexpectedly.

Rikka immediately consented, "Yes, no problem."

"Excellent, Rikka-dono. You make a good point and I would like to go along with it. However... Will you be alright?"

"What do you mean by that, Your Excellency?"

"From what I have heard, Prince Edward is rather skilled in his methods. Needless to say, my side shall provide assistance as much as possible, but to capture Hakone within ten days—"

"Indeed, this is a difficult trial, Lord Caesar. However..." Shiori finally spoke. With a gorgeous smile, there was calm confidence hidden in her tone of voice.

"If a trial of this magnitude were beyond our ability to surmount, how could we even dream of fighting alongside the armies of Julius Caesar...? It would be utter hubris."

"I see. Yes, you are indeed correct."

Shiori's grand speech was also satirizing the Japanese imperial family and the Kantō Fiefdom.

Caesar nodded casually, winking in a very charming manner. These humorous and mischievous antics were very much in the style of a handsome ancient Roman man.

"Dear comrades, since you insist on friendship with independent spirit, I shall accept your goodwill... One more thing, by the way."

Finally—The main event.

Caesar slowly turned his gaze to Masatsugu and Masatsugu looked back at him firmly. The two great Resurrectees looked each other in the eye, their gazes meeting for the very first time.

"You are Hijikata Toshizō, yes?"

"Some people call me that... But this isn't a question I should answer."

"Hohohoho. What a very clever response."

The very symbol of emperors and heroes, Caesar, smirked in delight, then asked another question.

"I believe you are the one in actual command here. May I ask if you are confident?"

"I can only say I'll do my best. This is the one thing I can assert with certainty."

Compared to the great hero before his eyes, who knew how much renown for valor was there in Tachibana Masatsugu's name?

It was anyone's guess at the moment, but renown was irrelevant once they stepped upon the battlefield. Only the powerful, the fortunate, or the intelligent were capable of winning victories.

That was simply the nature of war. Entrenched in this mindset, Masatsugu said, "Rather than competing for honor and achievement on the same battlefield as the famous hero Lord Caesar, fighting alone allows me to focus on the showdown against the Black Prince. Please look forward to the result."

"Hahahaha! Very well, I shall place my faith in these words of yours!"

It was times up for the noetic technique.



The ancient Roman hero's figure gradually faded away, turning back into Staff Officer Yang in his military uniform.

This was the first encounter between history's most famous hero and the nameless general.

Chapter 4 - The Hakone Siege

Part 1

"How peculiar."

This was meant to be a serious comment, but Wei Qing spoke in a rather carefree manner.

On the east side of Hakone was the first tutelary fort, Seiryuu Gate. Wei Qing had just witnessed the appearance of the ifrit guarding this place.

It was November 16th on Sunday morning, just as dawn was breaking.

"I never thought I'd ever encounter such a 'monster' on the battlefield," muttered Wei Qing.

Hakone's sky and mountains had acquired a rosy glow from the morning sun's rays.

The ancient Chinese general was flying in the sky over Hakone Yumoto.

He was riding a silver wyvern—The Eastern Roman military's flying retainer beast. This was virtually the same as what he had done in an age before the Common Era, riding across battlefields as a general on his trusty steed.

However, his attire was still a robe instead of a modern military uniform.

"The fortification walls are merely decoration. So that kind of monster is the real fortress here... Just as I've heard," Wei Qing remarked with poignancy.

He was currently near the Hakone Yumoto station, in the mountains a couple kilometers to the south.

This was the location of a star fort and nation-protecting keep, known as Seiryuu Gate, Hakone's first tutelary fort. In the sky over the nation-protecting keep, a strange monster had manifested.

It was a shining golden dragon, seventy meters in body length—

Imperial Japan's ifrits usually had a giant magic circle behind their back, but this golden dragon's gigantic body had an equally huge set of *three eyes* behind it.

The giant eyeballs were the manifestation of the powerful spirit from Britain, Morgan le Fay.

Examining the golden dragon's face closely, one would also notice *a third eye* had been added to the forehead area...

Next.

The three-eyed golden dragon roared thrice.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

A noesis barrier in the form of a shining golden dome covered the first tutelary fort Seiryuu Gate and the golden dragon.

"A golden dragon capable of creating a wall of light... And it has three eyes too, huh?"

For a Chinese general like Wei Qing, the dragon was supposed to be a mythical beast familiar to him.

However, Wei Qing smiled wryly at the encounter with this overly adorned "dragon."

Someone spoke up to this Resurrectee, "A merged divinity composed of Seiryuu, Suzaku, Byakko, and Genbu—According to information provided by the Kantō Fiefdom, that thing is apparently called the Four Gods."

Flying next to Wei Qing, a giant eagle had opened its beak.

This was an aquila, a Roman military retainer beast in the form of a bird with

a wingspan of almost four meters. It was speaking with the voice of Staff Officer Alexis Yang of the Roman army.

"This rare treasure was wasted the whole time because Japan lacked a spirit and a Chevalier capable of controlling it. Looks like it's been collared by the leader of the British forces!"

"Ah, you mean the Black Prince of rumor?"

Staff Officer Yang was physically lying down in the barracks of the Suruga tutelary fort this instant.

After being told that Wei Qing was attacking Seiryuu Gate, he had possessed the eagle retainer beast with his consciousness and flown to Hakone to observe the battle, so as to inform the Suruga side and Rome's generalissimo of the battle's process.

The ancient Chinese general also consented to Staff Officer Yang's presence.

"Resurrected in the modern world and my first major battle turns out to be against that kind of monster—Looks like my luck has never been good," Wei Qing continued to converse with a wry smile.

Taken literally, his words sounded like complaining. However, his carefree attitude was brilliantly balanced while his tone was calm and confident, causing none of what he had said to produce any negative impression.

Only a man who had abundant experience in both honor and hardship would be able to attain such a level of enlightenment.

"First, let us attack using the method seen on recorded video previously."

"What do you mean by that, General?"

"I am going to use exactly the same tactics as the Black Prince had employed."

"I see. So in other words, a frontal assault using a Resurrectee's Chevalier Strength of over a thousand to summon a great army to capture the four tutelary forts in sequence along the four cardinal directions, right?"

Such brute force tactics were impossible without an unusually large army.

As the one who suggested a bold and dignified approach to battle as befitted

a king, Wei Qing's Chevalier Strength reached 1051, a powerful force living up to his historical rank of "generalissimo."

Odawarajou was the Kantō tutelary fort nearest to Hakone. From there, Wei Qing mobilized with an army of a thousand.

"...Centuriae, please prepare to attack as I have just described."

Wei Qing's tone sounded more like a request than an order.

The army under his command was composed of the Eastern Roman Empire's mainstay Legion type, the Centuria.

The Centuriae raised their bayonet rifles and aimed at the enemy position.

Less than eight meters tall, the Roman Legions were not particularly large in build. They were outfitted with crested helmets and silver chain mail with a large rectangular shields in one hand. A single glance at their warlike appearance was enough to tell that they were "soldiers."

They were adorned all over by red fabric. The decorative wings on their backs were especially distinctive.

The Centuriae formed an encircling force. The dome-shaped noesis barrier of the Four Gods was surrounded by the silver-white Roman army over all 360 degrees.

This was a donut-style encircling formation with a hole in the center.

"What an amusing sight. The generalissimo with allegiance to the Han Dynasty yet commanding purely occidental Legions."

Staff Officer Yang commented from the eagle retainer beast he was possessing and Wei Qing agreed with a smile.

The type of Legion summoned by a Resurrectee was determined by *which sacred beast had brought them back to the living world*.

Wei Qing had been summoned from the underworld by the twin silver wolves of Remus and Romulus—in other words, the sacred beast entity that the Empire's founder, Caesar, had brought to East Asia from the Mediterranean.

Wei Qing issued orders without haste.

"Begin the attack to thoroughly penetrate the wall created by the Four Gods. Puncture and demolish it."

The Roman army kept firing scorching beams from their rifles.

Heat and shock struck the Four Gods' noesis barrier violently in volleys without interruption.

The focused barrage continued for around ten minutes.

However, the noesis barrier remained unscathed. Let alone a hole, it did not even suffer the slightest visible damage.

The first tutelary fort Seiryuu Gate's three-eyed golden dragon was in equally good condition—

After firing continuously for an extended duration, the Centuriae were exhausted, having consumed a fair amount of ectoplasmic fluid. Wei Qing ordered them to stop firing and take a breather.

"Using the same tactic, the Black Prince had effortlessly crushed the four strongholds' defenses. Unfortunately, it doesn't work against the Four Gods, so this will be troublesome."

The handsome Resurrectee was speaking in his unique carefree attitude.

His voice did not sound too troubled. Through the aquila's beak, Staff Officer Yang gave his opinion as a noetic master.

"This noesis barrier's hardness must be extraordinary for it to survive focused fire from a large army. Perhaps by gathering the four ifrits' noetic energy in one place, an especially sturdy barrier is formed!"

"Living up to its name as an impregnable fortress. Impressive."

No sooner had Wei Qing spoken, something happened at the noesis barrier covering the first tutelary fort.

The giant dome, two or three kilometers in diameter, erupted with intense sparks from all over its surface—

'Meteorological decree... Activate. Shining spear, bring forth death.'

An adorable girl's voice resounded in the sky.

Naturally, this was a mantra recited by the genie Morrigan.

The noesis barrier covering the first tutelary fort began to release electricity, sending giant bolts of lightning outwards to swallow the thousand Centuriae gathered in the surroundings.

"Isn't this firepower way too crazy!?"

"Centuriae, please deploy your barriers."

The merged divinity of the Four Gods had released incredibly powerful lightning on a massive scale. Even a "noetic expert" like Alexis Yang was extremely shocked.

However, Wei Qing remained unfazed and issued orders calmly.

The Centuriae deployed protective barrier particles, glowing white while their mystical properties took effect to neutralize external attacks.

The denser the formation of Legions, the greater the effects of the protective barrier—

Over a thousand strong, Wei Qing's Centuriae did not fear the suddenly incoming meteorological decree at all. The mystical effects of the barrier particles enabled them to survive the onslaught without casualties.

After the electrical discharge, the noesis barrier vanished unexpectedly.

Taking its place, a large force of black British Legions—roughly four hundred of them—appeared in the sky over the nation-protecting keep at the center of the first tutelary fort. These Legions were not ordinary Crusades.

They were the Knights of the Garter, the personal guard of Edward the Black Prince.

The Garter Knights divided up into four squads of a hundred. Each squad entered a square wall formation to occupy the positions east, south, west, and north of the tutelary fort...

Wei Qing murmured, "I see now. So this is the enemy's intent."

Every black knight was equipped with a longbow, nocked with an arrow of light, aimed outward.

"Outward" from the arrows of light were the thousand Centuriae surrounding the tutelary fort. With enemies in every direction, any random shot would hit a target. Positioned at each of the four cardinal directions, the Garter Knights had all 360 degrees covered.

As expected, the four squads of Garter Knights began to attack with arrows.

Furthermore, their weapons were magic projectiles of guaranteed death—

"That's Prince Edward's Feat of Arms!"

"The English longbow, isn't it? I have heard that its firepower is extraordinary..."

The Centuriae deployed their protective barriers.

However, these barriers were completely useless. The barrier particles, supposed to neutralize attacks, could not stop the arrows from penetrating the Centuriae's silver armor deeply.

Many Centuriae hastily raised their shields.

The heavy shields just managed to block the arrows, saving many of the silver Legions.

Those who failed to raise their shields in time were pierced directly in their vitals, crashing to the ground, dead...

The four hundred Garter Knights kept drawing their bows to fire.

From drawing the bow to loosing the arrow, the whole process only took five to ten seconds. They were amazingly skilled and experienced and kept firing in succession. The Roman encircling force, originally holding the upper hand, were now "sitting ducks."

Staff Officer Yang could not help but say, "General! Hurry and order the Centuriae to hide behind their shields—"

"No, it is futile. The Centuriae's shields probably won't last for long." Wei Qing rejected Staff Officer Yang's advice decisively and said, "Centuriae, please attack instead of defending. The soldiers in front should try to shield your comrades behind you as much as possible."

A minute or so went by...

The nightmarish English longbow continued to slaughter them.

In merely a minute—only sixty seconds—102 Centuriae had been shot dead. This number had reached 10% of the thousand Roman Legions.

However, under Wei Qing's command, the Centuriae kept their enemy encircled the whole time.

Enduring the rain of arrows, they raised their rifles again and pulled the trigger, trying to shoot back in retaliation.

They targeted the first tutelary fort and the longbow-wielding Garter Knights entrenched inside.

The enemy had disengaged the noesis barrier to allow the firing of arrows.

Logically speaking, the Centuriae's counterattack ought to inflict heavy damage. But unexpectedly, the dome of noetic energy was redeployed with perfect timing just before the attack. In control of the Four Gods, the powerful British spirit Morrigan had read the Centuriae's movements accurately.

Just before the barrier went up, the black knights also lowered their longbows.

The Black Prince in command of the longbowmen truly lived up to his name as a master general. He was fully aware of his supporting spirit's intentions and achieved perfect tacit coordination of offense and defense.

Facing the tutelary fort whose barrier was deployed again, Wei Qing said, "Oh dear, this is truly..."

Reduced to roughly nine hundred, the Centuriae continued to surround the enemy.

The Roman army resumed their volley fire, but the noesis barrier was rock solid. As soon as the focused barrage stopped, the British side retaliated mercilessly again—

The noesis barrier released a massive lightning attack in all directions.

All Centuriae were paralyzed by the electrical shock. The enemy instantly

disengaged the noesis barrier to allow the four hundred Garter Knights to ready their longbows and fire in succession...

After sixty seconds, Wei Qing lost another hundred Centuriae.

The Roman army's efforts to strike back were futile as the enemy had redeployed the noesis barrier again.

"At this rate, the siege battle is just going to repeat itself. My army will be wiped out in less than a day."

Only twenty minutes after the battle began, the army of Centuriae had already lost two hundred troops.

Witnessing the casualties, General Wei Qing simply gave a light sigh and did not sound like he was lamenting at all.

Quietly, he said, "With the enemy shutting themselves within the noesis barrier, there is no way for my army to break through from outside."

"You probably won't find another noesis barrier this durable elsewhere in the entire world. Why not withdraw for now and think of another strategy?"

"Then we might as well retreat back to Odawarajou."

"Huh?"

The aquila retainer beast was an eagle in form. In other words, a bird of prey.

However, Staff Officer Yang's stupefied voice coming from its beak did not suit its majestic image as a fierce bird of prey at all. In contrast, the handsome man from the Han Empire retained a cool and gentle demeanor and said with a smile, "We already know that the fortress is truly 'impregnable.' There is no need to attack *now*."

"...Ah, I see."

The reason why Staff Officer Yang was fortunate enough to serve Generalissimo Caesar directly was not because of outstanding abilities in strategy.

Bluntly stated, he was mediocre in this regard. Caesar merely found him convenient as "an intelligence officer with noetic skills." Still, he was a staff

officer after all.

With Wei Qing's hint, he finally understood the intent.

Staff Officer Yang concluded in his mind, *What an unfathomable man...*

Family name Wei. Given name Qing. Style name Zhongqing.

Since his birth mother was renowned as a beauty and attracted many lovers, Wei Qing's father was unknown. The government official claiming to be his father took him in as a servant, treating him no better than a slave since childhood.

The man who might have been his father made the young Wei Qing herd sheep.

Spending his days with a flock of sheep in the mountains, Wei Qing lived a life on horseback, herding livestock. One day, a chance to travel to the capital of Chang'an came unexpectedly. His long-absent elder sister had summoned him.

Employed in a rich and powerful household, the elder sister had the good fortune of *encountering the emperor and becoming his beloved concubine*.

Indeed, the emperor. Not just any emperor but Emperor Wu whose reign established the height of the Western Han Dynasty's supremacy. Thus, the "younger brother of the emperor's beloved concubine" began his rise in position and authority.

However, perhaps due to his humble beginnings...

General Wei Qing kept a low profile for his entire life, unwilling to attract attention.

"He is clearly a Resurrectee whose, Chevalier Strength exceeds 1000," said the simulacrum of the spirit Morrigan in puzzlement.

The doll was figure-size and stood thirty centimeters tall. Dressed in a sailor outfit, she was sitting on Edward's shoulder.

"In the end, he retreated so easily. Is he unused to siege battles?"

"Possibly, but even so, he is still an experienced warrior."

The confidence brought by victory made Edward smile.

He was riding a British white wyvern, flying leisurely in the sky over Hakone Yumoto. Previously cooped up in the noesis barrier, he was especially delighted for the chance to fly freely now.

"What do you mean, Prince?"

"Basically, effective siege tactics boil down to *only two types*. And neither of them are instantly effective. Given this dearth of choice, no matter which tactics are considered, all of them require foolishly sending troops to their deaths..."

Edward thought back to the distant Middle Ages and the wars he had taken part in.

"How about examining the battles of Crécy and Poitiers where our English longbows slaughtered the French armies...? Contemplate the extent of their folly."

The Feat of Arms—Archers of Crécy—had the ability to turn the Black Prince's knights into longbowmen.

Everyone knew that this ability originated from a textbook example of skillful longbow deployment.

The defeated French army had centered their tactics around "knights."

Knights, or heavy cavalry in other words. French knights rode their steeds gallantly across the battlefield to charge the English army that had set up their formation on a hill.

English longbowmen countered by firing a rain of arrows.

The French knights who braved the chaotic hail of arrows to reach the English position were greeted with ditches and pits ahead of them. On the other hand, the English knights dismounted voluntarily to ambush the enemy as infantry.

As a result, the English won an overwhelming victory at the Battle of Crécy.

At the Battle of Poitiers ten years later, the ditches and pits were replaced by a protective hedge.

In both of these great battles, the reason for the French defeats was the same. Essentially, "French knights charging recklessly into the English army's secured position."

"By the way, there was a similar fight in Japan. I believe it was called the Battle of Nagashino."

"Whether firearms or English longbows, one must exercise caution in attacking when the enemy possesses powerful projectile weapons."

Saying that, Edward grinned.

The enemy's intention to fight a protracted battle could be surmised from the the fact that the Roman general of unknown name and face had retreated here.

However, the British side was fully prepared.

For the past two months, the Restoration Alliance—no, the British Imperial Forces—had made various preparations to establish a reliable foundation to invade Kantō. This included securing supply lines to an impeccable extent.

That was why the British had not aggressively launched a "surprise assault on Tokyo."

"Now then, what will be your next move, Tachibana-dono...?"

The Black Prince knew the alias and appearance of the enemy general at Suruga.

Fully prepared to face any attack, Edward wondered what measures Tachibana Masatsugu would take. With these thoughts in his mind, he could hardly suppress the excitement naturally rising in his heart.

Part 2

"This is a video recording... of the battle at Hakone's Seiryuu Gate yesterday."

Reportedly, General Wei Qing had attacked Hakone before withdrawing very decisively.

Present at his side, Alexis Yang had used noetics to record the whole battle as a video.

The specialist in charge of replaying the video was Fujinomiya Shiori. This princess was currently the Tōkaidō Fiefdom's "Saiguu."

The group had traveled to the Fuji tutelary fort to hold a war council.

Apart from Odawarajou, Fuji was the tutelary fort nearest to Hakone. The new Tōkaidō provincial army's higher-ups and elite troops had finally gone to the frontier in order to keep their "promise" to the neighboring nation's generalissimo.

Attendees included the new Governor General, Akigase Rikka.

Also present was the "rising star" Tachibana Hatsune, whose Chevalier Strength was already 72 at the young age of sixteen.

Then there was Tachibana Masatsugu himself.

Tachibana Masatsugu was an alias, but no one knew his true name yet.

Recently, people have been secretly referring to him with another name. Everyone called him Imperial Japan's hero, Hijikata Toshizō.

Due to this, Masatsugu was given a squad with the flashy name of "Shinsengumi." Of course, since he was not very interested in his "real identity," this did not pose much of a problem.

"Even a three-eyed dragon came out to drive away a thousand Legions... I've never seen something so powerful at any tutelary fort I've been to." Sitting next

to Masatsugu, the little sister gave her opinion.

Everyone present was sitting at a round wooden table.

The table was large enough to sit over twenty people, so the group gathered together in the middle.

Other Chevaliers and officers were going to join later, but before that, the "new Tōkaidō Governor General and her closest advisers" were having a meeting first.

"I never knew Japan had such powerful defenses."

"No one had the ability to control it, so it has been sitting there unused for a long time," Shiori replied to Hatsune's comment with a sigh.

Incidentally, Hatsune was still dressed in *Haikara-san* style despite her new post as captain of the Shinsengumi's first unit.

"Forty years ago, the situation between western Japan and the Kantō Fiefdom was very tense. As a precaution against attacks from western Japan, they devised a plan to strengthen Hakone Checkpoint's fortifications. Back then, the first Empress, Her Majesty Himiko, prayed to Lord Tenryuu and received the enchanted ritual of the Four Gods Union."

Sacred beasts were godlike existences.

They would generously grant "mystical blessings" in response to prayers from their consorts or descendants.

In this manner, various countries in the world obtained mystic powers such as Legions or ifrits.

Hence, women who had inherited the blood of sacred beasts were put on a pedestal as royalty or imperial families, forming a class enjoying the highest of privileges—They were treated as "princesses."

However, Masatsugu had previously learned from Shiori.

The price for these "prayers" was one's lifespan. These princesses consumed much of their lives in every case. Who knew what price had been paid in order to seal the Four Gods of Hakone?

"By the way, Princess, about that Roman general," Hatsune asked curiously. "Why did he retreat immediately? It's true that Hakone's guardian deity was very powerful, but he probably could've lasted longer..."

"As it is right now, Hakone is impossible to breach from any direction."

Well-versed in military strategy, Shiori swiftly gave an answer.

"Presumably, he believes there is a more effective method than recklessly assaulting the fortress."

"There's something like that!? Then why don't we use the same method to—"

"Unfortunately, that is impossible."

Hatsune's expression was full of optimism, but the Saiguu of Tōkaidō rained on her parade.

"In truth, even famed generals did not have many means available to them when it came to conducting siege warfare. If I may put it in extreme terms, there are no more than two methods. One is to rely on specialized equipment to overcome moats and fortifications..."

"And the other is to starve the enemy of supplies, right?" Rikka revealed the second solution. "You are quite correct, Your Highness. Tachibana, did you know? Since ancient times, sieges have always been time-consuming affairs, which is why 'holding a castle' is especially effective."

As one would expect from a seasoned veteran, Rikka knew this very well.

In fact, she had personally *held* the Suruga tutelary fort for over a month.

"By focusing on defense while waiting for external reinforcements when the enemy attacks, defenders in many cases were able to reverse an initially unfavorable situation."

"Oh right. I've heard 'two years of siege' before..."

"General Wei Qing's choice is precisely the use of starvation tactics." Now that Hatsune understood, Shiori said to her, "His victories in his past life were all won against the Xiongnu tribes. The Xiongnu people were fierce equestrians who dominated the lands to the north and to the west of China."

At this juncture, Shiori inexplicably sneaked a glance at Masatsugu.

Rather than motioning to him with her eyes, she had simply shifted her gaze involuntarily.

"Since the Xiongnu were nomadic tribes who followed their herds and did not build towns or castles, naturally, General Wei Qing should have virtually no experience in besieging fortifications."

"No wonder he chose starvation tactics instead... But we definitely can't do that."

"Indeed, Lord Caesar is set to arrive in Japan eight days later... It is impossible to sever the British supply lines and starve them within this time frame."

"Then what about the other method? Like using equipment to breach a castle."

"During ancient and medieval times, there were battering rams, catapults, or even trump cards such as structural engineering or explosives... But there are no such equivalents in the modern world."

"After all, tutelary forts are protected mainly by ifrits and Legions."

Shiori sighed and Rikka concurred wistfully.

"Ultimately, only Legions can oppose Legions. The attacking side needs to outnumber the defenders three to one, so assembling a great army is part of the basics of siege warfare. However, exactly how many Legions would be needed to attack a tutelary fort that stood up to a thousand Centuriae...?"

Perhaps everything that needed to be said had been said.

The ladies naturally sealed their lips and stopped talking. Silence descended upon the scene. They were not in deep thought, instead, it was the heavy atmosphere of helplessness.

After a good amount of time, Masatsugu finally spoke up. He knew it was his turn to share his view— "I've thought of several ways to attack Hakone."

"Really, Onii-sama!?"

"Yes. Some of them are feasible while others are quite challenging. We

definitely don't have much time... But there is still some leeway."

Hatsune's eyes brightened up. Masatsugu offered her reassurance then proceeded to speak indifferently as always.

"My idea will be taking form in the next few days. You'll need to help me out too."

"Yes, no problem!"

"Masatsugu-dono, could you enlighten us regarding your solution?"

Masatsugu's calm tone was extraordinarily effective.

Rikka recovered her usual dignity and imposing presence and asked Masatsugu about his battle plan.

"Of course, we must first feign intentions to cut off Hakone's supply lines to conceal our aim for a quick showdown. Also, Princess, please act as a liaison together with that Staff Officer Yang to maintain close communications with the Roman army."

"Roman army? You mean the force stationed at Odawarajou, Masatsugu-dono?"

"Yes. That General Wei Qing... is *quite a useful* man."

Masatsugu assessed Wei Qing's ability very clearly and decisively.

Frankly speaking, the strategy displayed in Wei Qing's first battle was less than satisfactory. Trying to find the most suitable method in the heat of the moment was admittedly commendable, but unimpressive. Wei Qing had not demonstrated competence as befitted a famous general.

However, his "plain" and "disappointing" qualities were terrifying.

Masatsugu even went as far as to conclude that these traits were what made the Resurrectee, General Wei Qing, truly valuable, no less than the magnificence of Prince Edward or the untamed nature of Richard I— Assuming Wei Qing had chosen *the most unassuming* tactic on purpose...

Then he would be a man to be depended on.

"The greatest issue here is that I need a full resupply."

Shiori and Hatsune shuddered as soon as they heard the word "resupply."

The special method for providing Tachibana Masatsugu with ectoplasmic fluid was a secret only privy to those two girls.

Rikka was puzzled, so Masatsugu revealed his secret candidly to clear up the new Tōkaidō Governor General's doubts.

After listening to the explanation, Rikka was uncharacteristically flustered, her entire face turned bright red.

"I-In other words, Masatsugu-dono, your ectoplasmic fluid comes from Her Highness and Tachibana?"

"Exactly."

"O-Obtaining warmth through skin contact?"

"Indeed."

"As princess and knight, or siblings in name, you are engaging in such scandalous behavior!?"

"Yes. However, I am loath to increase the princess and Hatsune's burdens any further. Because of that, I've come up with an alternative solution."

"!? What do you mean by that, Masatsugu-sama!?"

"Y-You don't need the princess or my help anymore!?"

"If we do it my way, maybe I won't need to trouble you two again."

Shiori and Hatsune jumped in shock, questioning Masatsugu in a panic. After replying to them calmly, Masatsugu gazed upon Rikka's beautiful face.

The alternative solution required approval from her, the new Governor General.

"Rikka-dono—"

"M-Masatsugu-dono, don't tell me you would like.."

"Indeed. That is exactly what I'm suggesting. Please give me your consent."

"I-Isn't this too early to discuss!? I-I need to prepare myself mentally first. Even if you are the one requesting it, I am hard pressed to agree straight

away...!"

Rikka cried out emotionally, turning her head away in embarrassment.

She could no longer bear Masatsugu's straightforward and sincere gaze.

How rare to see such a reaction from a hero among women. One could hardly blame her. Masatsugu's request was far too abrupt.

However, there was no other way. Masatsugu bowed his head and pleaded in earnest.

"Please. Those Chevaliers of the Tōkaidō Fiefdom—Allow me to take ectoplasmic fluid from them."

"...Huh?"

For some reason, Rikka was rendered speechless. She was so surprised that she could not speak.

"From the knights... serving my fiefdom?"

"Yes. Previously, I had no one to turn to except for the princess and Hatsune, but the situation is different now. We have gained many Chevaliers."

"Masatsugu-sama, it is true that we have more Chevaliers now, but please note that they are all men!"

The demure and dignified Shiori was inexplicably shaken too.

"A-Are you telling me that you will be doing *that* with men too!?"

"Of course. If I rely on them, resupplying will be much easier. Besides, with ten-odd strong and healthy men—"

Masatsugu had not forgotten that he was to blame for imposing a heavy burden on the young and frail Shiori.

"If I use them to resupply, I won't have to worry about health burdens."

"Denied, Onii-sama! That's way too obscene, even though I'd like to watch too!"

"Hatsune is correct. As your liege, I absolutely forbid it!"

This secret technique for making dramatic comebacks was the linchpin to

conquering Hakone.

However, the princess and the little sister were raising their voices harshly, chiding him to stop. Their ally—Akigase Rikka—was frozen in shock, unable to close her gaping mouth.

Part 3

After Masatsugu told Rikka about the secret of resupply, followed by the war council as scheduled...

He went to the seaside.

This was Fuji City's port of Tagonoura and also the same location he had visited twenty days ago. Last time, he staged a disturbance here to rescue three Chevaliers who had been captured by the British...

The sun was gradually setting in the west.

Under the rays of dusk, there was an indescribable sense of beauty in the evening view of Suruga Bay.

However, Masatsugu did not come here to enjoy the scenery.

"This is the British ship, right? *Jingle bell* or something."

"I remember the ship is named the *Tintagel*."

Masatsugu was chatting with Hatsune, who was driving.

At the pier of Tagonoura, a large foreign military ship was moored.

The destroyer *Tintagel*—When the Tōkaidō army retook Fuji City from the Restoration Alliance, they not only captured British soldiers in the city but also this ship at the port.

The ship's total length was 183m with a loaded displacement of 15 thousand tons.

Rather than a streamlined military vessel, it bore a greater resemblance to minimalist and avant-garde Scandinavian furniture. However, Masatsugu had heard that this was the result of applying designs for stealth.

The power source was a fluid reactor making use of artificial ectoplasmic fluid.

To some extent, a fluid reactor replicated some of the functions of a water shrine.

Usable as a mobile base of operations for winged giant soldiers, this ship could be called a kind of aircraft carrier.

"Why did you come all the way here, Onii-sama?"

"I was a little curious after hearing its name mentioned during the war council. There's a chance it might come in handy."

"It'd be pretty cool to sail on this ship to attack Hakone Checkpoint."

"Definitely, if only Hakone were located by the sea."

"Isn't Lake Ashi a kind of sea...? I heard they have rainbow trout and smelt there."

"There's also black bass, but it's a pure freshwater lake that's completely cut off from the sea."

The British ship was supposed to be off limits, but Masatsugu asked the guarding infantry to open the boarding gate. This could be considered one of the privileges afforded to Chevaliers.

Chatting casually, the siblings strolled around in the ship.

The deck. The helicopter hangar. The steerage section in the ship. The multi-purpose hall. The mess hall. The kitchen. The recreation room. The shower room. The sick bay— They did not encounter a single Tōkaidō soldier, much less anyone British.

The ship was completely deserted after being sealed off. Inside the sick bay, where there was no one else, Hatsune said, "The ship should be able to move once the fluid reactor is switched on... As for stuff like weapons control and enemy detection, they can't be used without a spirit's power, right?"

"Looks like it. This is also Morgan le Fay's doing too."

The destroyer *Tintagel* was the British Empire's cutting-edge military ship.

Its anti-air weapons control system was linked to the genie managing the ship, thus conferring mystic power upon the ship's artillery.

Including weapons control, all noetic systems had been securely sealed.

According to the analysis of Tōkaidō noetic officers, this was probably done by the spirit managing the ship, Morgan le Fay.

Reportedly, even accessing important information from the ship's database was impossible.

Putting aside the Black Prince and the Lionheart, it was quite surprising to find out that the British had such powerful forces lying in ambush.

Once again, Masatsugu was confronted with the enemy's strength.

"By the way, Onii-sama, were you serious about what you said earlier?"

Hatsune asked suddenly.

"B-Basically, taking ectoplasmic fluid from men!"

"Totally serious. Who would joke around with something like that?"

Masatsugu objected calmly as usual, but the little sister spoke awkwardly, a far cry from her usual cheerfulness. "But, this means—having s-skin contact with men, to warm your body... How do I say this? Don't you find this kind of behavior off-putting at all!?"

"Hmm, nope."

"Ehhh!?"

"Just think of visiting the arctic. When taking on the harsh chill of extreme winters, huddling together with comrades for warmth is very normal behavior. Gender is irrelevant."

"Even naked men hugging together!?"

"I don't mind stripping for the sake of necessity."

"Stop sounding like an actress, okay? U-Umm, Onii-sama, has this ever occurred to you? What if a man gets attracted to you after experiencing skin contact and develops feelings for you...?"

"You mean a man falling in love with me?"

Masatsugu stared at Hatsune solemnly, causing the little sister to put on a

fake smile in a rare moment.

"J-Just hypothetically, okay? But Onii-sama, no matter how bold you are, I'm sure you must feel a little resistant against this kind of thing..."

"Nope, actually it's fine."

"Huh?"

Hatsune exclaimed with a stupid voice and Masatsugu spoke haltingly, "Even if the other party is male, as long as the feelings are sincere—I'd still consider seriously whether to accept or not. In the end, mutual love is not out of the question..."

"Onii-sama, you don't have a problem with falling in love with a man!?"

"I can't say for certain since I don't have that kind of experience. Now that I think about it, since I've lost my past memories. If I happen to swing that way in my previous life... It's no big deal, I guess."

"Of course it's a big deal. I personally forbid it!"

"...Why?"

"No why! S-So, stop saying you'll resupply using men, okay...?"

So far, Hatsune had been very worked up during the conversation.

Unexpectedly, she lowered her voice all of a sudden and wrapped her arm around Masatsugu's arm with a sad look on her face. She looked like a worried child, seeking comfort from a parent—It was hard to imagine a strong-willed woman like Tachibana Hatsune acting this way.

Furthermore, Hatsune glanced at the bed. Only then was Masatsugu reminded they were at the sick bay.

"I know I'm making a selfish demand... but I'll work even harder."

These tempting words implied that she was going to work harder at offering herself to him from now on.

Masatsugu was quite surprised. He had never seen his little sister behaving like this.

"I'm willing to dedicate all my strength and soul to you, Onii-sama. Don't

worry, I'm healthier and more persevering than the average guy. I won't lose to those Chevaliers..."

Just now, Masatsugu had asked Hatsune why she objected.

There was no need to ask again. He figured it out as soon as he saw Hatsune's reaction. Who could have thought that Hatsune would get jealous over something so minor— Finding her innocence very adorable, Masatsugu glanced at the bed too.

The two of them sat down on the white sheets, whispering to each other.

"You also shared ectoplasmic fluid with me this morning. I don't want you to strain yourself too much."

"Don't underestimate me. This morning was already half a day ago. O-Okay, turn around first. I.. need to prepare."

Masatsugu turned his back to Hatsune and stared at the sick bay's wall.

He could hear the sound of disrobing behind him.

Their relationship of physical intimacy had gone on for about ten days or so. However, Hatsune was still bashful of showing skin in front of Masatsugu.

Normally cheerful and energetic, Hatsune behaved innocently only when alone with Masatsugu.

This contrast was also very cute.

"O-Okay."

"....."

Obtaining Hatsune's permission, Masatsugu turned his head around without saying a word.

Hatsune had taken off her *Haikara-san*-style kimono and hakama, and even the specialized underwear for pairing with Japanese clothing. She only had a blanket from the bed draped over herself.

Using her left arm to cleverly cover her breasts, she did not bare herself fully.

Hatsune looked extremely embarrassed.

At dusk, the setting sun's red rays were streaming in through the ship's round window. Hatsune's face and body were bright red, but not because of the sunset illumination.

"Hatsune."

"U-umm. This might sound a bit immodest, Onii-sama, but I want you to take as much warmth as you can—That's why I was wondering, maybe it might be better if I undressed more. P-Perhaps there's no need to go this far..."

"No, this is great."

Masatsugu wrapped his arms around Hatsune's shoulders and drew her into his bosom.

The two of them embraced on the bed with Hatsune ending up on top. Face to face, up close, they smiled at each other.



Normally, Masatsugu's smiles were minor twitches of the cheek without much expression on his lips.

However, he always felt that it was moments like these when he smiled naturally.

"Onii-sama..."

Whispering, Hatsune pressed her lips against Masatsugu's neck.

The kiss felt sweet and romantic. With Hatsune on top, Masatsugu could feel a pleasant weight against him.

Their legs very naturally entwined together.

Meanwhile, Hatsune suddenly reacted with alarm, realizing she was kissing her brother. It had evidently been a subconscious act.

"S-Sorry, Onii-sama. You do this from time to time, so I..."

"Did I ever do this?"

"Yes... You do, but not every time."

"You don't like it?"

"W-Well, it's not like I don't... That's why I'm..."

Hatsune's words were far too cute. Masatsugu felt compelled to hug her magnificent figure tightly. Hatsune smiled happily and kissed Masatsugu on the neck again.

The two siblings embraced for a while—

Masatsugu's cold body slowly started to warm up.

At the same time, seductive sighs were escaping from Hatsune's lips.

"Mmmm... Mmmmm... Huah. Ah—It feels hotter than usual, Onii-sama..."

"What's wrong?"

"I'm trying hard to warm you up, Onii-sama—and now my own body has become very hot... My mind is dizzy, it's hard to think..."

"You did all this for me?"

"Y-Yes... Mmmm. Huah—"

Masatsugu sat up with Hatsune sitting on his lap. They were on the bed, face to face, hugging each other tightly.

"Hatsune."

This time, it was Masatsugu's turn to bury himself against Hatsune's pale neck.

The adorable little sister's body was fiery hot. Masatsugu sucked on her neck, trying to absorb heat from her body. As hot as boiling water, her body *cooled down slightly*.

"Onii-sama!"

Hatsune called out to Masatsugu, her emotions reaching a climax.

Only after remaining in embrace for several minutes did her boiling body temperature subside. Masatsugu was just about to release the girl in front of him who was only wrapped in a blanket.

However, Hatsune hugged him tightly on her own initiative instead.

"No, Onii-sama... I made my decision, I've got to work harder than usual today. Please take as much from me as you can..."

Of course, the little sister had already worked so hard, Masatsugu did not want to add to her burden unnecessarily. However, Hatsune's endearing vibe aroused Masatsugu's passion and he embraced her forcefully again.

In the end, Hatsune's body temperature climaxed two more times.

Each time, Masatsugu obtained substantial ectoplasmic fluid and body warmth.

After the third time, even Hatsune with her outstanding stamina was exhausted. Masatsugu could hear the breathing from her sweet slumber on the bed.

Covering up Hatsune's naked body with the blanket, Masatsugu admired her sleeping face for a moment.

Then he left the sick bay.

His tour of the destroyer *Tintagel* was only half done.

Masatsugu planned on finishing his rounds before rousing Hatsune to leave together. First, he exited the interior of the ship, then walked across the deck towards the bridge section that resembled a tower.

This was where the captain of the ship, the officers in charge of the helm, and the fleet commander would gather.

One could call it the command tower of the destroyer *Tintagel*.

"A military ship, huh?"

Standing by the window, Masatsugu looked "outside."

Standing on the deck, the tower-like bridge was the height of a small building. On a the sailing ships of old, one would only get this kind of view from the crow's nest on top of the mast.

Night had fallen.

Since the ship was moored at the pier, Masatsugu could get a full view of Suruga Bay that surrounded the port of Tagonoura.

Gentle moonlight and the constellations of early winter were illuminating the water surface. Today, the sea was quite calm. There was a serene atmosphere to the marine scenery of the night. However, Masatsugu did not feel anything special.

On the other hand, the first time he rode a wyvern, it had felt nostalgic.

"My past life seems to have nothing to do with ships."

"Did you come here just for the sake of confirming this?"

...Someone spoke to Masatsugu from behind.

Masatsugu was not really surprised since he had already noticed her presence. Calmly, he said, "Going around alone without a bodyguard is quite imprudent, Princess."

He looked back to see Fujinomiya Shiori right before him.

Part 4

Hearing Masatsugu's criticism, Shiori responded with displeasure.

"Do not treat me like a child. You should be well aware that one would be hard pressed to find a noetic master more powerful than I am."

"Indeed."

Shiori was dressed in a white blouse with a navy-blue skirt. Quite prim and proper casual clothing. She was also wearing the pair of glasses she used as a disguise, presumably with image manipulation noetics applied.

Getting back to more important matters, Masatsugu answered the princess' question. "Actually, when I heard this ship's name during the war council, a strange idea occurred to me. I wonder if this *Tintagel* ship could be used in the next battle."

"You want to use this ship to invade Hakone—a mountain fortress?"

"Yes. If I was an expert at using ships for war in my past life, perhaps I might be able to come up with a good plan..."

"So that was why you came to check out the ship in person?"

"Unfortunately, it was just my imagination. I couldn't come up with anything."

"After all, even the British Empire's cutting-edge ship would not be able to traverse mountains."

"Yes, it turns out I came here for nothing."

Masatsugu's blasé conclusion brought a smile to Shiori's face.

Of course, Shiori was not laughing at Masatsugu, but finding his reaction quite cute. However, she immediately resumed a solemn expression and murmured in worry. "The fact that you resorted to a vague instinctive notion of this sort implies that the conquest of Hakone must be very challenging from your

perspective too..."

"The Four Gods system is definitely difficult to handle."

The Suruga tutelary fort was protected by the spirit Sakuya and the ifrit Seiryuu.

Unfortunately, the guardian deities on both sides were not comparable at all. The spirit Morrigan was controlling the merged entity of Seiryuu, Suzaku, Byakko, and Genbu— A partnership between such a monster with Prince Edward was undoubtedly the worst enemy.

"In fact, some ideas have occurred to me after witnessing the power of the Four Gods. If I were to use appropriate means as an imperial princess, it might be possible for me to seal that monster away effortlessly."

"....."

"I am currently researching whether this method would work or not. Could you please wait a moment?"

"Princess, if you do this, your life will—"

"It is unavoidable for the sake of realizing great ambition. Relax, I will turn to other means if the strain proves to be too great."

In a rare moment, Shiori responded partially in jest and smiled, "It would be far too foolish if I were to fall ill so soon after assuming my position."

"Agreed. Please take care of yourself, Princess."

It had been so long since the last time they were alone and could have a proper chat.

Both of them felt the same way. On further thought, in the past, they would set aside time every night to be together, to replenish ectoplasmic fluid and take the opportunity to have heartfelt conversations.

"I-Incidentally, Masatsugu-sama, regarding the matter of resupply."

Shiori changed the subject. Her thoughts had turned to ectoplasmic fluid too.

"Y-You wish to ask male Chevaliers to provide—"

"Are you against it too, Princess?"

"Uh, I-I am not too supportive of that... I-I don't mean to discriminate or anything—It is not because I consider homosexual behavior subversive to society and shouldn't involve my knight. However, I simply do not want you to do it, Masatsugu-sama."

The princess brought out many "vague" reasons, probably because she was flustered.

What an adorable reaction. Masatsugu deliberately asked her in response, "You won't accept it, only because it's me?"

"Y-Yes... Umm, Masatsugu-sama."

The princess looked up with determination.

The glasses disguise added to her intellectual image.

Sure enough, she was a beautiful woman. Banishing the uncertainty in her eyes with willpower alone, Shiori said timidly, "I have rested long enough... There is no problem now."

Emotionally reserved, Shiori mustered her courage to present her demand.

Anyone who was not aroused by these words must be mentally impaired. Without another word, Masatsugu picked up the princess in his arms.

"Kyah...!?"

"Princess, of course I need your help too."

Using a literal "princess carry," Masatsugu moved her to a leather seat nearby.

Leather seats would be quite extravagant for a military ship's standard issue equipment. Perhaps this was for the captain's exclusive use.

Masatsugu had the princess reclining on the seat.

"I-I will get ready now..."

Shiori sat up after stammering.

She unbuttoned her blouse. Kneeling on the seat, she unfastened her skirt's clasp and the navy-blue fabric slid down.

The princess of dragon blood had a white blouse draped on her shoulders.

The rest consisted of her neat and trim pink underwear and the stockings covering her legs. For Masatsugu's sake, she went as far as to bare her taintless skin.

Shiori's posture was kneeling on the seat.

This compensated for their height difference, putting Shiori and the standing Masatsugu at roughly eye level.

Perhaps it slipped her mind but she did not remove her glasses disguise. Looking more scholarly than usual, the princess was within arm's reach.

"Princess, please grace me with your blessing."

"Don't put it like that. I would not not be alive without your help. For you, this bit of sacrifice is nothing—"



Masatsugu embraced the princess while she was murmuring.

Shiori hugged him in turn, accepting his embrace. Suddenly inspired with a mischievous notion, Masatsugu whispered in Shiori's ear, "Princess... Are you sure this is purely a sacrifice?"

"Q-Quit spouting nonsense and focus now."

While scolding Masatsugu, Shiori actively rubbed her cheek against him as though seeking affection. She was pressing against Masatsugu's cheek and it seemed like a subconscious act.

This behavior was an indication of the princess' feelings and the distance between the two of them.

Shiori's sweet reaction seemed to be expressing her unbearable loneliness. This also set Masatsugu's heart aflame.

He embraced Shiori even harder, perhaps a little too rough on a noble lady.

However, Shiori accepted Masatsugu completely.

"Masatsugu-sama..."

The princess called his name in rapture, then burying her face into Masatsugu's neck, she kept kissing his skin gently.

Now that Masatsugu thought about it, Shiori was more experienced than Hatsune in the process of replenishing ectoplasmic fluid.

Although her poise and behavior were prim and proper, she had shared extremely intimate moments with Masatsugu. Currently, she was caressing Masatsugu's back and arms, doing her best to warm up the Resurrectee's cold body.

"...Princess."

"...Masatsugu-sama."

They even felt that calling each other's name would deepen their bonds.

Finally, Masatsugu's body warmed up as he absorbed the essence of ectoplasmic fluid from Shiori smoothly.

Masatsugu recalled the previous scene.

During the resupplying process, his little sister's body had become as hot as boiling water. The heat had turned into a great amount of ectoplasmic fluid to provide Tachibana Masatsugu with the energy for battle. Furthermore, Hatsune had attained unprecedented excitement.

Masatsugu told himself to focus and refrain from stealing heat for now.

Soon, Shiori experienced a change.

"M-Masatsugu-sama... Today, I... feel a little strange. My body is hotter than usual, the dizziness, it is making it difficult to think—"

Shiori murmured to herself as though talking in a dream.

Under her glasses, her eyes became unfocused, losing her usual edge.

"Huah... Masatsu—Mmmmm! Ah... Mmmmmm... Ooooooh!"

Struck by a flood of emotions as though a dam had ruptured, the princess could no longer suppress her voice. Masatsugu relaxed himself at the same time.

Scorching heat instantly surged into Masatsugu's body.

Trying her best to endure the flow, Shiori also reached her limit.

"Ah—"

Shiori's entire body went limp.

Thus, Masatsugu's lady liege passed out, but there was a smile of satisfaction on the corners of her lips. Her dazed demeanor was quite blissful.

Masatsugu could not leave the fainted Shiori behind and exit the ship.

Besides, there were still things he had to do on the destroyer *Tintagel*. In the end, Masatsugu picked up the princess in his arms and returned to the sick bay from earlier.

Hatsune was lying on the only bed, fast asleep.

She showed no signs of waking up. Fortunately, the bed in the British ship's sick bay was quite large and should be capable of fitting three or four Japanese ladies.

Masatsugu placed Shiori next to Hatsune and went up to the deck alone.

The moon and the stars were out tonight.

"Now then—"

Masatsugu began to think again. He decided he should still go ahead with the plan to take ectoplasmic fluid from the male Chevaliers of Tōkaidō.

Although he was grateful to Shiori and Hatsune's feelings, victory hinged upon this crucial matter after all...

"Monarch's dog, you have suffered much from the shortage of energy."

A sudden voice from behind startled Masatsugu.

He had not sensed the visitor, unlike the case with Shiori earlier. Masatsugu slowly turned around and saw a young girl dressed in a blue kimono and haori.

The girl had a pretty face and looked like she was in the upper years of elementary school.

Not only was her clothing blue—Even her hair was glowing with blue radiance!

"Do you know who I am?" The girl was clearly no ordinary person, so Masatsugu decided to cut straight to the chase.

The girl in the kimono was haughty in manner, her smirking countenance almost like a mischievous child's.

"Strictly speaking, I don't know anything. However, I do have a few thoughts from looking at your face."

"Something like a flash of inspiration?"

"You are a dog, and for virtually all of your past life, you were a ruler's dog."

"You... aren't human, are you?"

"You can discern that? Impressive, undead one. No wonder my princess holds you in such high regard."

Having said that—Immediately...

The mysterious girl who spoke like an elder vanished into thin air.

She had disappeared without trace like a messenger pipe fox. Did she use teleportation? Just as Masatsugu was intrigued, someone else appeared on deck.

The one walking up to Masatsugu directly was whom he had been waiting for.

They had agreed to meet on the *Tintagel* tonight.

"Thank you for your patience, Masatsugu-dono."

The visitor was Tōkaidō's new Governor General, Akigase Rikka.

Part 5

"Oh right, this would be my first time seeing you in casual clothing, Rikka-dono."

"Indeed, I am always wearing my military uniform. Do I look odd... dressed like this?"

Tōkaidō's premier Chevalier looked a little insecure.

Tonight, Rikka was wearing a black rider jacket with gray skin pants. This combination accentuated her excellent figure—especially her slender legs.

The air temperature was not too chilly tonight, but Rikka's jacket zipper was closed.

Masatsugu narrowed his eyes slightly and said, "Of course not. It looks great on you."

"P-Please don't flatter me. By the way—"

Rikka cringed in embarrassment and said, "This has been bothering me the whole time. You do not need to speak too formally. As a Resurrectee in Her Highness' service and an officially recognized Chevalier, your status is no less than mine."

"I should say the same goes for you."

Remaining calm as always, Masatsugu argued against Rikka, "There's no need for you to be obsessed with manners when talking to someone like me, Rikka-dono. I'm lucky enough to have a place in Tōkaidō's hierarchy only because I serve the princess."

"Then allow me to put things differently, Masatsugu-dono."

The girl who had risen from being House Akigase's Chevalier princess to the Governor General refused to back down.

"You might be the famous hero, Hijikata Toshizō. Even as a fiefdom's Governor General, I must offer the greatest of respect towards someone as important as you. This is part of the show, so please accept it."

"I see."

"Besides, let me be frank. Masatsugu-dono, I wish for us to bare our souls to each other... To build a relationship of candid congeniality. Your full cooperation will be greatly appreciated."

Rikka smiled mischievously and even winked.

To insist any further would be boorish, so Masatsugu agreed to her request.

"Understood, then let's start with some candid conversation... Actually, I consider myself quite lucky tonight for the chance to admire you in your casual clothing, Rikka-dono."

"Th-This kind of candid conversation is way too abrupt!"

Masatsugu's honest confession ended up making Rikka complain.

"I have heard that you remain quite committed to a beauty contest, Masatsugu-dono. It turns out you're more of a smooth talker than I imagined."

"I really hope you'll enter the beauty contest too, Rikka-dono."

"I think I shall pass. I am a daughter of the ruling house, not to mention the Governor General now."

The vibe in their conversation was slightly different from before.

After responding cordially to Masatsugu's invitation, Rikka changed the subject.

"Also, about the... question of asking my fiefdom's knights to supply ectoplasmic fluid."

"Are you against it too, Rikka-dono?"

"Of course. Masatsugu-dono, the issue of your resupply is top secret. I-If you get *involved* with an unspecified number of knights, even the most confidential of secrets will be leaked!"

"True, you make a good point."

Only after listening to Rikka did Masatsugu realized this possibility.

He had been too careless. Racking his mind over matters of war, he had overlooked this one point. Tōkaidō's new Governor General looked down and said, "Th-That's why I have made my decision to take my retainers' place... to provide you with ectoplasmic fluid, Masatsugu-dono."

"You're willing to do it, Rikka-dono?"

"Yes... Oh, but please do not get the wrong idea!"

Rikka suddenly said in anger, "I-I am not interested in you simply because you might be Hijikata Toshizō. That is clearly not the reason why I started feeling curious about you, to the point of finding it impossible to ignore!"

"I see."

Rikka had evidently confessed through a suspiciously specific denial. So this was what she meant.

"Then I will be relying on your help in the future."

"W-What about now? I am fine with it."

"Now?"

Rikka was showing a shy expression but her tone was quite firm, surprising Masatsugu a little.

"Yes... There are not many days left before the deadline for capturing Hakone. Also, I need to catch up—Oh, scratch that, I mean that as someone who joined later, I should do everything I can to help you in what limited time we have, Masatsugu-dono, no less than Her Highness and Tachibana Hatsune."

"You are this determined, Rikka-dono?"

"As determined as any samurai ought to be."

This was more like a maiden's determination, but Masatsugu kept his comment to himself.

Taking the casually dressed Rikka into his arms, he gazed upon her spirited and beautiful face.

"In that case, would you care to indulge me?"

"I-I may be inexperienced but if you are alright with that, please proceed..."

Rather than embarrassment, this aristocratic daughter seemed more fearful of the unknown.

The black rider jacket wrapping her upper body tightly had the zipper pulled all the way to the top.

Needless to say, this piece of clothing was a hindrance to the ritual.

Masatsugu casually pulled down the zipper and was surprised again.

"A-As for the method of replenishment, I have heard..."

Rikka's voice was very quiet.

Under her jacket was a short tank top.

It looked almost like a bra, exposing Rikka's narrow waist completely. Moreover, she was apparently not wearing underwear beneath this flimsy tank top.

Smiling with a twitch of his cheek, Masatsugu removed her jacket.

The bridge's wall happened to be behind them, so Masatsugu had Rikka sit down, leaning her back against the wall. He also bent over, intending to embrace Rikka from the front.

"Please, Rikka-dono, share a little of your warmth and ectoplasmic fluid with me."

"Oh, hold on—" Just before Masatsugu hugged Rikka, she said quietly.

Rikka was very nervous at the thought of what was coming next. Gazing into Masatsugu's eyes, she declared with acute fortitude as befitted a hero among women.

"Please absorb as much as you can, rather than just a little. It is because you lacked ectoplasmic fluid, Masatsugu-dono, that Her Highness collapsed in exhaustion, right?"

"Well..."

"Perhaps it might sound rude for me to say this, but I'd like us to relate as equals, Masatsugu-dono, Resurrectee that you are. Please do not hold back on

my account. I'd rather have you give me rough treatment as an ally on equal terms—That would make me happier instead."

"....."

"And please do not underestimate me. I train no less than Tachibana Hatsune. There is no need to be careful with me."

Masatsugu smiled. Rikka was displaying her mettle as befitted a contemporary hero.

She did not want to place the Resurrectees such as Masatsugu or Prince Edward on a pedestal, to treat them as supernatural monsters. Neither could she tolerate the fact that she was inferior to them.

Even if she could not equal them in power, at least she would never lose to them in spirit. Rikka was determined to catch up to them one day.

It would be rude to refuse Rikka's candid request that was brimming with pride. Hence, Masatsugu hugged the aristocratic daughter's beautiful body tightly.

Rikka's soft bosom was compressed against Masatsugu's chest.

In terms of volume, her bust lost to Hatsune and the princess by a slim margin. But in terms of overall shape and texture, Akigase Rikka edged out slightly.

Masatsugu was currently enjoying the dignified beauty of her skin.

Once his body started to warm up, Rikka's gaze began to lose focus gradually.

"The next part might get tougher and tougher..."

"I welcome it gladly. To think that your body was this cold, Masatsugu-dono—Mm, ah..."

Rikka was a little out of breath. It seemed like something was stirring inside her.

Using the same principle as before, Masatsugu was suppressing his absorption of heat. However, even taking that into account, the temperature of Rikka's entire body was rising too fast.

Perhaps Rikka had this sort of aptitude—Her body and soul heated up extremely easily.

Seeing a reaction different from when Shiori and Hatsune started out, Masatsugu reached the above conclusion. However, this was of no consequence at the moment.

"Rikka-dono, please relax your entire body."

"I... understand. Ah, mm ahhhhhhhhhhh!?"

As soon as she relaxed, heat was instantly sucked out of her entire body. Tōkaidō's premier lady knight fainted in Masatsugu's embrace.

The warmth and ectoplasmic fluid she had lost was now residing in the amnesiac Resurrectee's body.

"Thank you so much..."

Masatsugu covered the sleeping Rikka with her jacket.

Thanks to assistance from Princess Shiori, Tachibana Hatsune, and Akigase Rikka, Masatsugu now had the resources to put up a fight at last. He felt quite heavily indebted to them.

...Masatsugu noticed that his blood was boiling and the beating of his heart had grown stronger.

After taking ectoplasmic blood from three girls consecutively, Tachibana Masatsugu's mystic powers had risen dramatically, changing his body and soul.

Masatsugu thought that the situation would settle down soon—But unexpectedly...

"Hmm...?"

His surrounding scenery changed all of a sudden.

He was originally in late-twentieth-century Japan, on the deck of a military ship moored at a port.

Spontaneously, he found himself riding a malnourished horse, racing across a vast grassland. In fact, this was a fierce warhorse capable of crossing thousands

of miles.

Previously, Shiori had led him to watch "past memories" once.

The current scenery was identical to what he had seen last time.

"Is it because my power... ectoplasmic fluid increased all at once?"

Masatsugu knew this was a vision, something similar to a dream.

Together with his elite troops, he was dashing single-mindedly across this endless wilderness. But unlike last time, Masatsugu felt a sense of certainty in his heart.

This time, he had a "destination" in his dream, and a certain man was waiting for him there...

That guy was surely leading his own army, heading to the same location. However, the route he was taking was completely different from Masatsugu's.

Who knew how many hundreds of kilometers separated the two armies?

Riding on without stopping, he would certainly find a way to converge with his ally. Then together they would annihilate the enemy army waiting for them, to assault the targeted capital.

Victory is certain if it is us. A new sense of certainty took root in Masatsugu's heart.

Even though they were not related by blood, they were allies and comrades equivalent to brothers.

The two armies led by that man and Masatsugu were the empire's strongest spear and fastest arrow. Two swords. As a pair, they were known as the "Two-Headed Dog"...

"XXX."

Masatsugu was just about to say his ally's name.

Only then did he realize he had forgotten the name of this reliable man.

Part 6

After Masatsugu and company spent the night at the destroyer *Tintagel*, dawn arrived.

"Good morning, Princess."

"G-Good morning... Uh, what is going on here?"

Masatsugu had gone to the sick bay on the ship for a morning greeting. Waking up on the bed, the princess looked around in disbelief.

One could hardly blame her. She had no idea when she had been moved to the sick bay.

The morning rays were entering through the ship's window.

Tachibana Hatsune and Akigase Rikka were sleeping on each edge of the bed respectively. Gaps in the blanket's positioning offered glimpses at their sexy figures.

"Mm~ ...I'm too full to eat anymore..."

Speaking in her dream, Hatsune was naked under the sheets.

As for Rikka, she was wearing a short tank top with gray skin pants (Masatsugu had removed her socks and shoes).

More importantly, Shiori herself had nothing on except for her pink and neat underwear.

"Kyahhhhhhhhhhhhh!?"

The princess' mouth emitted an unbecoming scream.

This sound was loud enough to wake Hatsune and Rikka.

Thirty minutes later...

Masatsugu left the *Tintagel* on his own, greeting the guarding infantry along the way.

He returned the key he had used to board the ship. Next up, he was not returning to the Fuji tutelary fort. Instead, Masatsugu made his way to a large seaside park near the port of Tagonoura.

He had been there the last time he visited Fuji City.

On that occasion, he had secretly taken ectoplasmic fluid from Shiori while keeping Hatsune in the dark. Currently, the three girls were sitting on that same bench, waiting for Masatsugu's arrival.

The three girls were the princess, her personal lady-in-waiting, and the Tōkaidō's new Governor General, of course.

The three of them had left the ship first to avoid scandals of "spending the night together with him."

" " " " " "

Shiori and Rikka were not talking. Even the usually cheerful Hatsune was silent.

A gloomy air seemed to be hanging over the three girls. Also, Masatsugu still had not explained what happened last night, but presumably, the girls must have exchanged information while waiting for him.

Actually, there was no need to exchange information. One could surmise the basic situation simply from the state of the bed upon awakening...

Masatsugu first bowed his head to his liege Shiori in gratitude.

"Princess, thank you very much for last night."

"Y-You are welcome. As your liege, Masatsugu-sama, this is only the least I could do..."

In this rare moment, the princess was at a loss for words. Masatsugu turned to his little sister Hatsune and his ally Rikka to express his thanks too.

"I am also very grateful to you, Hatsune and Rikka-dono. Thanks to the ectoplasmic fluid you gave me, I have received unprecedented power. Perhaps

due to that, I've recalled some of my past—memories from my past life, in other words."

"R-Really, Onii-sama!? That's wonderful!"

"Strictly speaking, they're not complete memories but fragments."

"Indeed... Masatsugu-dono, your noesis is stronger this morning than ever before."

Hatsune was happy for Masatsugu while Rikka narrowed her eyes and smiled.

The three ladies present knew very well that the power filling Tachibana Masatsugu's body and soul had reached another level. His Chevalier Strength had probably surpassed four hundred now— He had broken through a hurdle that had been insurmountable until now.

At this rate, it should be possible to become plenty prepared prior to attacking Hakone.

"Y-You mean the ectoplasmic fluid... received from all of us?"

"Almost certainly," Masatsugu asserted firmly.

Rikka motioned with her eyes to the princess and the junior Chevalier.

"Your Highness, j-just as I have mentioned earlier, to avoid having an unspecified number of Chevaliers getting involved with Masatsugu-dono— Scratch that, to avoid having too many people privy to this secret, therefore..."

"Y-You mean we alone shall take care of resupplying, right?"

"It's true, I don't want Onii-sama to go out of control and make things even more complicated. A-Although I'm a bit curious about men doing that to each other..."

As expected, the girls had discussed among themselves beforehand.

Judging from their reactions, Masatsugu was struck by a sense of déjà vu, like three countries locked in a conflict over the same piece of land.

If no one was willing to compromise, every country would suffer great losses.

Instead, it would be best to reach an agreement to handle the problem in a "lenient" manner for the time being. This was what the current situation

resembled, and Masatsugu wondered if he should be saying something about it.

Just as he was about to speak...

"Hey, isn't it my turn to speak?"

Someone behind him spoke first. Despite talking like a self-important elder, the voice was an adorable girl's soprano. Masatsugu had heard this voice before.

He looked back to see the girl from last night.

The girl was dressed in a blue kimono. Her done up hair was glowing with blue radiance.

Holding a fan in her hand, she exuded an aura of aloofness unique to those steeped in the occult. Shiori was the first to greet this striking girl.

"You have finally arrived, Rindou-sensei!"

Rindou-sensei was akin to Princess Shiori's own Zhuge Kongming, if one were to use a Three Kingdoms analogy.

At this very moment, Tachibana Masatsugu finally made the connection between this face and name.

"Too bland."

After tasting the drink she had ordered, Rindou-sensei complained.

Shiori originally wanted to get to the main point, but the mysterious girl had made a demand first.

'I am thirsty after coming to a dusty town. Bring me a cup to moisten my throat first. Hey, maidservant over there, get me a drink.'

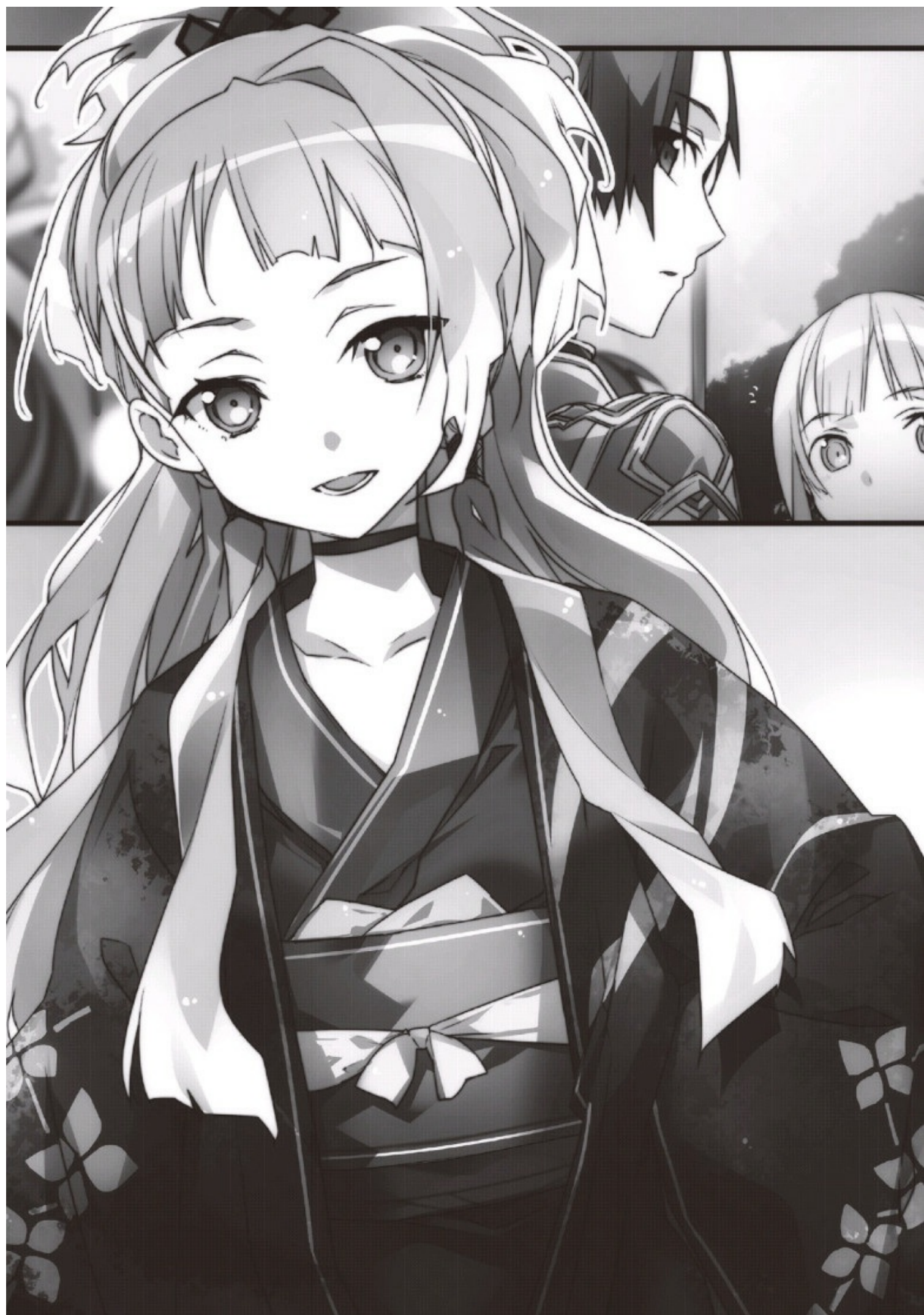
'I am talking to you! When I say a drink, do not bring tea or coffee by any means.'

'The only drinks acceptable to me are alcohol and prajna soup!'

Without asking anyone to introduce themselves, she was already ordering the lady-in-waiting Hatsune around.

After revealing this extraordinary feat of perception, Rindou-sensei had made even more outrageous demands. Everyone watched as Hatsune left and returned fifteen minutes later, carrying beer bought from a convenience store. Rindou-sensei frowned and complained as soon as she took a sip.

She even said, "Good grief... I am a connoisseur of alcoholic beverages, after all. I do understand the profound custom of 'anyway, let's have a beer first' but this is no good at all. Maidservant, be a little smarter if you are going to entertain your princess' benefactor, and bring some local Suruga beer, okay? Even though it is a relatively light beer, it does have a certain richness to it."



"I-I'm still a minor so I don't know anything about drinking."

Hatsune was quite troubled.

Never in her wildest dreams would she have expected a young girl, looking like an elementary school student, to be lecturing her.

Meanwhile, Rikka whispered quietly in the princess' ear, "Your Highness, I recall that she is your guardian who lives in seclusion at the hot spring district of Mount Yu, right?"

Mount Yu was within Suruga City in a way.

However, it was located in the mountainous region of the Southern Alps. This was a part of the mountains where there was nothing except for hot springs, not even a remote village.

Rikka then said, "I heard she is quite advanced in her years, right?"

"Yes. Actually, Sensei has a reason for appearing before others like this—"

"A genie, huh?"

Masatsugu's muttering interrupted the whispers between the two girls.

He was asking Rindou-sensei directly. The girl in the blue kimono smiled proudly and took another sip of beer.

"Impressive, undead one. I'm surprised you discerned it."

"The fact that you can drink... implies you are corporeal. So you have the ability to appear in front of people without relying on projected images or possessing simulacra."

"Don't compare me to those inferior beings."

Rindou-sensei raised her can and emptied it without letting a single drop escape. She must be a drinker with amazing tolerance.

"My true identity is Fukuryuu, the Crouching Dragon, highest in rank among the likes of retainer beasts, spirits, and demons in this world."

"That explains the keen intuition."

"Indeed. Of course, there are limits to my miraculous powers when using this

form. Please do make bizarre requests of me, understood?"

"Still, Sensei, thank you for coming to see me."

Shiori's tone was filled with gratitude and she even presented a small bottle of domestic whiskey.

This was something that Hatsune had bought at the convenience store together with the beer. Rindou-sensei accepted it with satisfaction and swiftly opened the cap for a sip.

"Yesterday, Princess, you delivered an entire crate of *daiginjou* along with a letter with a question, didn't you? On account of the excellent taste, I have decided to answer your question."

After giving a very materialistic reason, Sensei brought up the heart of the matter.

"You asked me if there was any enchantment to take control of Japanese ifrits using imperial blood, didn't you? Jumping straight to the conclusion, yes indeed —"

"Are you serious!?"

"Mm-hmm. However, it can only be used near the divinity baseplate in the enemy position. It will not be useful for the attack on Hakone, that's all."

Rindou-sensei was very frank and Shiori was disappointed.

"Indeed, the divinity baseplate is hidden inside the tutelary fort. In order to sneak inside, the noesis barrier must be neutralized in one way or another..."

This was equivalent to capturing a tutelary fort.

It was admittedly a useless method. Masatsugu agreed—But then he figured out something unexpectedly.

He finally understood why the destroyer *Tintagel* had aroused his curiosity in particular.

A sudden flash of inspiration of sorts. Perhaps *this method of using it* might come in handy during the upcoming battle.

"Princess, let's first set aside the issue of whether to use that enchantment or

not. There's something for which I'd like to have your instruction."

Masatsugu's tone was indifferent as always.

However, there was a certain vibe in his words. The three ladies and Rindou-sensei also focused their interested gazes upon him.

Unfazed, Masatsugu spoke softly.

"The plan for attacking Hakone Checkpoint has finally come together."

Chapter 5 - Bloodlines of Sacred Princesses

Part 1

November 22nd, Saturday.

Akigase Rikka's succession to the post of Governor General had taken place exactly a week ago.

During this time, General Wei Qing had headed out to battle, Tōkaidō's elites had gathered at the Fuji tutelary fort, and even Rindou-sensei had arrived.

As for the "Vice-Commander of the Shinsengumi," Tachibana Masatsugu...

He ordered the Tōkaidō Chevaliers to attack Izu once a day.

This was the location of the Nagahama tutelary fort occupied by the Restoration Alliance. In the waters offshore of the Izu Peninsula, the British had three sister ships of the *Tintagel* on active duty.

Restoration Alliance Legions using that area as their base of operations were protecting the *supply lines* there.

Namely, the supply lines from Izu to Hakone over, sea, land, and air.

Attacking the three British vessels and the defending force occupying the Nagahama tutelary fort would affect Hakone's supply situation adversely.

For this purpose, Masatsugu had been sending hundreds of Kamuys to various parts of Izu day after day.

General Wei Qing, who was leading the Roman army, and the Kantō Fiefdom's Chevaliers were following the same strategy. Cooperating in surprising concerted attacks, they cleverly disrupted the Izu situation.

Not to be outdone, the Restoration Alliance summoned many Chevaliers to Izu to meet them in battle.

For the past week, both sides engaged in defense and offense every day.

As for today—

Masatsugu set off from the Fuji tutelary fort, but for a different purpose.

First of all, he traveled by car to the Yamanashi region under Tōkaidō jurisdiction. Then switching to helicopter at Yamanashi, he crossed the prefectural border on the east to enter Kanagawa—thus arriving at *Odawarajou*. Furthermore, he did not go alone.

The new and beautiful Governor General, the little sister, and the noble lady liege also accompanied him.

"During the Edo period, Hakone Checkpoint was established near Lake Ashi."

Akigase Rikka and Tachibana Hatsune were listening attentively to Shiori's history lesson.

"Back then, the checkpoint was roughly four Japanese leagues from Ogawarajou, which is equivalent to sixteen or seventeen kilometers."

"That's less than a day's walk on ordinary roads."

"In practice, this required ascending the precipitous mountain paths of old Tōkaidō, which was no easy task."

"Hakone Checkpoint was a fortress during the Edo period and an inspection point with strict controls over 'the entry of firearms and the exit of women.' In other words, women from daimyo households leaving Edo and the carrying of firearms into Edo."

The current mood was laid back and casual, but it was also true that they were currently gathered at a particularly private location in *Odawarajou*.

The three girls were at the massive water shrine underground of the tutelary fort—In the bath there.

The decor and architectural style was reminiscent of an ancient Roman bath.

The ectoplasmic fluid vat filled with blue holy water was also built from marble, giving off a solemn atmosphere.

Completely naked, the girls were soaking in the artificial ectoplasmic fluid.

The battle to capture Hakone was imminent and they were in the process of resupplying.

As an imperial princess, Shiori had decided to participate in the battle anonymously. Hence, she was also immersing herself in ectoplasmic fluid to boost her mystic powers even though she was not a Chevalier.

Unintentionally, Shiori's thoughts drifted in a certain direction.

"So these two have gotten into intimate relationships with Masatsugu-sama too..."

"? Did you say something, Your Highness?"

"N-Not at all. Nothing of consequence, please pay it no mind."

Shiori had accidentally murmured to herself.

While deflecting Rikka's curiosity with a smile, she secretly pondered.

(Perhaps too much has happened between me and Masatsugu-sama...)

Inexplicably, Shiori felt very curious about the figures of the other two girls.

Akigase Rikka was slim and trim in build.

However, she was by no means bony. Voluptuous in all the right parts as befitted a woman, the line from her bust to her waist was exquisite, bulging out and curving in appropriately, and the beauty of her form was enough to incite jealousy from any woman in the world.

Comparing herself to Rikka's figure... Shiori was a bit disheartened.

The princess had started her growth spurt at the age of fourteen, but she was never a fan of exercise. Compared to a lady Chevalier who trained diligently in martial arts, she seemed too flabby—Bluntly stated, she felt a bit "too fat."

On the other hand, Tachibana Hatsune's maturation had exceeded Shiori, the lady she served.

Even dressing in a kimono could not hide her magnificent bust.

However, Hatsune was a member of the Tachibana clan, who prided themselves on strength, after all. Frequent rowdy incidents and martial training had kept her slim in all the right places. Overall, hers was a voluptuous and undulating figure brimming with feminine beauty.

Needless to say, Hatsune's figure was the more full-bodied type.

However, Shiori was worried that such volume would better suit a man's tastes. Previously, she had read a men's magazine on a whim and one article reported the prevailing world-view of "size matters, the bigger the better."

In addition, there was another worrying element.

Compared to Rikka and Hatsune, Fujinomiya Shiori's intermediate figure was merely "half-baked"—Would this make her insufficiently attractive?

(These thoughts are totally meaningless...)

Recently, Shiori found herself inexplicably bothered by such matters. She was worrying whether Fujinomiya Shiori was lacking in attractiveness compared to the women around her.

She had never faced similar troubles before.

(Why am I agonizing over this? From an objective standpoint, I am undoubtedly a young maiden possessing beauty far beyond average norms...) Shiori knew on a rational level, but could not stop thinking about it. This was quite a conundrum.

They were about to attack Hakone and she forced herself to banish these thoughts.

At that moment, she noticed that the two other girls had spontaneously fallen silent. Everyone was contemplating, sneaking glances at one another's figure...

"B-By the way, Princess and Rikka-sama," Hatsune hastily spoke up, "That General Wei Qing we just saw earlier... He's pretty handsome."

"I would agree, but of course, he is just not my cup of tea."

Unexpectedly, Rikka joined in on this type of frivolous conversation.

Perhaps she wanted to dispel the current awkward atmosphere too. Presented with this chance opportunity, Shiori decided to take it up.

"His elder sister was a renowned beauty who became the beloved consort of Emperor Wu, whose reign marked the pinnacle of the Han Empire. Perhaps he bears quite a facial resemblance to his sister."

The beautiful Wei Zifu had rose from being the emperor's beloved concubine to official empress.

The Wei family were originally lowly commoners. Wei Zifu worked at the household of Princess Pingyang, Emperor Wu's elder sister, which was how she found the opportunity to catch the emperor's eye.

Hers would be the quintessential tale of rags to riches, and the same applied to her younger brother too.

"Living in the remote mountains of China, tending to sheep, this young man went to the capital and began working as a laborer in the imperial palace thanks to his sister's connections. After learning of this, Emperor Wu made him a general and gave him an army of ten thousand to command."

"T-Ten thousand troops for a newcomer right off the bat!?"

"Yes. First of all, he was the younger brother of the emperor's beloved consort. Additionally, it was because the enemy consisted of Xiongnu nomadic tribes."

Shiori smiled at the sight of Hatsune's look of astonishment.

"General Wei Qing grew up relatively close to the Xiongnu sphere of influence. Furthermore, he knew many nomadic 'colleagues' from his sheep herding days—In other words, he had quite a few Xiongnu acquaintances... This also meant that he knew the ways and customs of the enemy better than anyone else."

"But even with these reasons, isn't he being favored way too much?"

"Normally speaking, people like him would only meet a tragic end, such as leading the army of ten thousand to death or fleeing back to the capital in disgrace. Surprisingly, all the other generals were defeated by the Xiongnu, but

only General Wei Qing returned in triumph."

"Meaning that the aforementioned handsome guy had inborn talent as a general, to an unbelievable degree, right?" Rikka was extremely impressed.

Shiori nodded and said, "Yes, General Wei Qing would continue to distinguish himself, accumulating victories against the Xiongnu, rising to the dual posts of Chief Defense Minister and Generalissimo. However, for better or worse, his personality was extremely reserved and low key, and he stayed out of the spotlight in the army and the imperial court. I suppose one could call him a courteous and modest gentleman who treated his subordinates with kindness..."

"Your mission is as I've just explained. Do you understand?"

"...Understood."

Masatsugu confirmed repeatedly and the other party shifted her gaze in response to him.

However, the reply was weak and lacking in confidence. It was hard to say that a dialogue had been established.

The one whom Masatsugu was talking to was precisely the "shy" genie, Sakuya.

Sakuya looked like a young black-haired girl dressed as a shrine maiden. They were currently at Odagawarajou's central keep, overlooking the streets of Odagawara City and Sagami Bay.

This regional city facing the Pacific Ocean was located on the western end of the Kantō plain.

During the Sengoku period, the Houjou clan dominated the Kantō region and Odagawara was their stronghold. Like Atsumi, this historic castle town was the port city nearest to Hakone.

"Why can't you be more like that Rindou-sensei?"

".....?"

"Rather, I suppose Rindou-sensei is the exception."

The first thing Masatsugu did after arriving at this castle was establishing a tutelary pact with the underground water shrine.

The girls in his company were currently bathing to replenish ectoplasmic fluid. Masatsugu used this opportunity to talk to Sakuya, who had been brought here to undertake a certain mission. Very clearly, their dialogue was not lively at all.

"Looks like asking Rikka-dono to come along was the right decision."

Sakuya was the Suruga tutelary fort's guardian spirit. The principal image of the ifrit was still at Suruga.

They had brought Sakuya along for her to fulfill a certain mission. However, Sakuya was only willing to open her heart to long-time acquaintances. Just as Masatsugu shrugged, someone spoke to him, "You are Tachibana Masatsugu-dono, I presume?"

"And you are—General Wei Qing, right?"

This was the first encounter between these two, brought back to life from their deaths in the ancient past.

This general of the Eastern Roman Empire was a gentle-looking handsome man dressed in blue Chinese clothing. In contrast, Masatsugu was wearing his usual stiff-collar uniform with a new battle surcoat on top.

"I am counting on your support today, General Wei Qing. By the way, are you sure you don't mind?"

"What do you mean?"

"General Wei Qing, you will be serving as my support on this occasion. I feel bad about relegating you to such an unassuming role."

With Alexis Yang as the liaison, the Tōkaidō side had contacted the Roman army at Ogawarajou and the Kantō Fiefdom's castellan of Ogawara a number of times. Using the telephone or relaying messages through retainer beasts, there were many opportunities for direct communications.

Of course, the Ogawara castellan essentially agreed with everything said by the Roman side.

In actual practice, General Wei Qing was the only person whom Masatsugu

needed to talk to. The battle plan the two of them devised today basically followed Masatsugu's ideas.

That was because General Wei Qing had accepted all requests made by the Tōkaidō side.

When the discussion was essentially over, Masatsugu wondered to himself. Why did General Wei Qing not raise any opposition against Tōkaidō at all?

Was he passive as a person or did he not have any plan better than Masatsugu's?

Or perhaps, he held a kind of enlightenment and confidence—He was deeply convinced of his ability to prevail over any kind of situation? For some reason, Masatsugu felt that this was the most probable.

"Hahaha, please do not let something so trivial bother you."

Masatsugu had apologized first, but General Wei Qing laughed cheerfully.

"This is actually better because I do not like excessive attention."

"It's great to hear that from you."

Looking at General Wei Qing's handsome face, gentle and smiling, Masatsugu was very certain.

Richard the Lionheart, Edward the Black Prince, and Generalissimo Caesar were all people who enjoyed being the center of attention, but this man was the complete opposite.

Perhaps because of that, Wei Qing was a famed general with unique qualities — Masatsugu noticed General Wei Qing staring at him with curiosity.

"Is there something on my face?"

"No, actually, I have this unbelievable feeling."

The handsome Resurrectee showed an expression of nostalgia.

"When speaking to you, I get this impression... as though I am meeting someone from my homeland of the past. Excuse me for being forward, but may I inquire of your origins?"

"....."

"Born within the borders of Chinese territory—That does not seem to be the case for you. How unbelievable."

"Don't ask questions of this sort. I can't answer you."

"My apologies." General Wei Qing apologized to Masatsugu with a light smile. "I overstepped my bounds. Please forget I ever asked."

Prior to setting off to this battle, Masatsugu had received a great amount of ectoplasmic fluid.

This was owed to the three girls helping him. However, the powerful noesis emanating from him made it impossible to hide the fact that he was a Resurrectee.

Masatsugu politely declined probing attempts and General Wei Qing accepted with an open mind.

In any case, the two ancient generals were about to fight a common enemy in a joint operation.

Part 2

"Prince, you do not seem too trustful, right?"

The spirit Morrigan went straight to the point.

"You do not trust, the impregnability of this fortress, Hakone Checkpoint..."

"It is not as though I distrust it. I simply believe that things used by humans can likewise be taken down by humans... Wouldn't you agree?"

Edward the Black Prince sounded confident and composed in his answer.

The two of them were on the roof of the nation-protecting keep, roughly forty meters above ground. Hakone Yumoto's skies were overcast today with thick, dark clouds.

It was currently late November, on the afternoon of the 22nd. Winter was fast approaching.

Mountain wind was howling and the air was quite cold.

This location was the eastern part of Hakone Checkpoint, the first tutelary fort Seiryuu Gate—On the roof of the nation-protecting keep in the middle of the fort, Morrigan was conversing with her superior officer.

Since this area was an entrance into Hakone, the altitude was much lower than at the center.

However, the temperature today had definitely dropped substantially.

"That is why you issued the order, 'Retreat from Hakone at your own discretion.' Right?"

This was the order that Prince Edward had issued ten minutes ago.

He had discreetly relayed the order to his adjutant, Lieutenant Colonel Grayson, at the third tutelary fort Byakko Gate on the west. The pre-condition for carrying out this order was when circumstances prevented Edward from

commanding the battle.

"Relax. Grayson will be fine. If deemed necessary, he will surely lead all our forces into the Izu Peninsula or the Pacific decisively."

The Black Prince was calm in tone as though he were uninvolved, even *in the midst of battle*. Morrigan's response was equally calm.

"Battle has commenced, no more than two hours ago, right?"

"This is a necessary command since I have personally gone to the front line. Today's opponent is the Resurrectee in the Roman camp who has finally launched a counterattack... According to intelligence, he is a famed general from ancient China named Wei Qing."

Roughly two hours earlier...

Hakone's four prided tutelary forts, situated in the four cardinal directions, were attacked simultaneously.

Attacking the first tutelary fort on the east were a thousand Centuriae led by the rumored General Wei Qing.

Attacking the second tutelary fort on the south were a hundred and twenty Centuriae, also from the Roman side, together with seventy Kamuys of the "variant with elongated heads," perhaps belonging to the Kantō Fiefdom.

Attacking the third tutelary fort on the west were two hundred Tōkaidō Kamuys from Fuji.

Attacking the fourth tutelary fort on the north were a hundred and eighty Tōkaidō Kamuys from Yamanashi.

"Recon from retainer beast units and analysis by the noetics team, complete."

A sprite retainer beast happened to arrive with a message.

Morrigan used noetic waves to read its contents and reported indifferently.

"Apart from General Wei Qing's army, all others are formed from multiple Chevaliers—Mixed forces, in other words. Furthermore, none of the 'red-purple Legions' have been seen at any of the four battlefields."

"Tachibana-dono has yet to take to the field, huh?" Edward muttered to

himself.

In the sky over the nation-protecting keep, a three-eyed golden dragon manifested.

This was the merged divinity of the Four Gods. Having deployed a secure noesis barrier around the first tutelary fort, Seiryuu Gate, they were ready for anything.

As for the thousand Centuriae under General Wei Qing's command...

Looking out from the tutelary fort, the Centuriae could be seen occupying the sky in the Odagawara direction in a square wall formation.

Compared to the donut-style encirclement last time, they were slightly farther away.

"Has the enemy discerned the ifrit's weakness?"

Edward smiled fearlessly. Last time, the British side had used the Four Gods to deliver massive lightning strikes to pin down the enemy. The range of that meteorological decree only extended seventy or eighty meters outside of the noesis barrier.

Having discerned this, Wei Qing had forbidden his Legions from getting into range.

From a hundred meters away, General Wei Qing's Centuriae entered a square wall formation and attacked Seiryuu Gate's noesis barrier using volley fire.

"Open up the *top*, Morrigan."

"Roger, that."

So far, the dome-shaped noesis barrier had covered the entire tutelary fort.

Obedying her superior's command, Morrigan disengaged the top portion of the noesis barrier. A group of Legions were looking up at the hole over their heads.

They were the four hundred Knights of the Garter that had gathered in the courtyard of the first tutelary fort.

They were all armed with longbows of steel. Wielding their bows in their left, the four hundred black knights aimed diagonally up, then nocked their arrows

and drew their bows with their right.

"My loyal knights, fire English arrowheads into the Roman position!"

At the Black Prince's command, the four hundred Legions, that had turned into archers, began to shoot.

These longbowmen did not aim at specific targets. They simply fired at the "opened top of the dome" to produce a continuous outward stream of arrows of light.

Thousands of arrows of light shot into the sky then descended along parabolic trajectories.

In other words, countless arrows kept falling from the sky in a literal "rain of arrows." Furthermore, this rain of arrows consisted of deadly magic projectiles that could not be stopped by the protective barriers of Legions— One after another, the silver Roman Legions were shot down by the arrows.

The black knights' shots did not follow straight lines and were different from pinpoint penetration.

This method relied on luck in order to strike vitals. Even so, these arrows inflicted definite damage regardless where they hit.

Even as a random curtain of projectile volleys, the killing power was still astounding.

Compared to last time, the efficiency in enemy elimination was not as superb, but still extraordinary.

This type of application was a characteristic of the English longbow formation. Making good use of secure defenses with the Archers of Crécy was Prince Edward's specialty.

"Prince, situation reports from the second, third, and fourth tutelary forts. Relying on powerful noesis barriers, every tutelary fort continues to hold against the enemy. In every battlefield, our side, the Restoration Alliance, is holding the upper hand."

Edward was the only Chevalier defending the first tutelary fort, Seiryuu Gate.

All the remaining Chevaliers had been sent to defend the other three tutelary

forts. Back when the British learned that General Wei Qing was attacking Seiryuu Gate, the Black Prince had decided to defend this spot himself.

"Despite what I said earlier, the Four Gods have definitely proven to be very powerful. With the divinity stationed at Seiryuu Gate in the east, to think that it is possible to deploy equally durable noesis barriers at the tutelary forts in the west, south, and north..."

Prince Edward smiled wryly.

The merged divinity of the Four Gods was playing a key role at three other locations.

At the second tutelary fort in the south, Suzaku Gate, a giant three-eyed phoenix had manifested.

At the third tutelary fort in the west, Byakko Gate, a three-eyed tiger with golden fur had manifested.

At the fourth tutelary fort in the north, Genbu Gate, a three-eyed golden turtle with a snake for a tail had manifested.

Each divine beast was equal in power to the "three-eyed golden dragon" guarding Seiryuu Gate. This four-in-one collective entity was precisely the merged divinity of the Four Gods.

By combining the noetic energy of four ifrits, it was said that their power could be raised to the fourth power.

This was the defense concept behind the Four Gods system, but of course, its power reached only three or four fold in practice, nowhere as outrageous as raising to the fourth power. Moreover, extended usage could cause instabilities in the Hakone region's ley lines, hence it must not be overused arbitrarily...

Currently, the attackers were invading from the four cardinal directions simultaneously, hence, the power of the Four Gods was also intentionally dispersed.

This was a wise decision. Once any of the other three locations no longer needed defending, the freed up Four Gods could be temporarily "lent out" to another tutelary fort for combined defense...

Simply impregnable. This experimental fortress was truly quite astounding.

"Say, Morrigan."

"What is it? Prince."

"Wouldn't you agree that it is time for *him* to take action?"

"....."

"The power of the Four Gods is indisputable. However, it is ultimately a power bestowed upon this nation by Lord Tenryuu, Imperial Japan's sacred beast. Do not forget *Eleanor's warning*."

"Of course, I have not forgotten—Prince, another message!"

A new sprite teleported next to them.

Morrigan instantly read the message brought by the small retainer beast and projected a window in midair.

Instead of showing words, the window played back a video in real time.

A gigantic object appeared, one that was very familiar to both Edward and Morrigan. But why? Why was it showing up here?

While confounded, Morrigan was filled with rage at the sight of her stolen belonging.

"I see... So such a move is possible too. It is so simple, and so ridiculous, that I never expected it. No, this method of usage is far too wasteful!"

Prince Edward suddenly laughed cheerfully.

Through astute perception, he had swiftly figured out the enemy's intent.

However, rather than "impressed," he was expressing "what the hell are they doing?" through exasperated laughter.

"In sight at last..."

Masatsugu finally arrived in the air over Hakone.

Riding a blue wyvern, he looked at the Hakone mountains beneath. A couple hundred meters ahead were the vast waters of Lake Ashi.

His ally, Akigase Rikka, was also riding a wyvern, flying beside him.

Their target was the second tutelary fort, Suzaku Gate, located on the south shore of Lake Ashi— "So that's the second of the Four Gods. Now that's overly grand."

"Indeed, golden objects are too ostentatious."

Rikka agreed with Masatsugu's unbiased opinion.

Hakone's second tutelary fort also featured star-shaped fortification walls

A giant phoenix with a wingspan of seventy meters had appeared in the air, spreading its wings in an awe-inspiring display. There was a third eye on its forehead—The mark of Morgan le Fay.

This phoenix was the part of the Four Gods guarding Suzaku Gate.

Just as in the east, an impregnable noesis barrier was deployed around the tutelary fort.

Like at Seiryuu Gate, the *top* of the dome was open.

Suzaku Gate did not have Garter Knights for defense. Two hundred white British Crusades were standing ready inside.

Conversely, the attacking side consisted of a hundred and twenty Centuriae.

Mixed among the silver Roman Legions was a Japanese army—Seventy Kurou Hougans, the Kamuy variant with an elongated helmet resembling an *eboshi*, a type of headgear worn by court nobles in the past.

Before Masatsugu and company sortied, Hatsune had entered Hakone first.

The Kurou Hougans and the Centuriae opened fire, slowly marching upon the second tutelary fort, Suzaku Gate. They were attempting to approach the enemy through low-speed flight.

The defending side relied on their secure barrier but did not neglect to strike back.

Powerful flames from the meteorological decree invoked by the British were pinning down the approaching coalition force. Whenever an opportunity arose, they sent a few dozen Crusades to fly out from the top of the dome to fire their

rifles repeatedly.

The attackers was thrown into disarray by the defending side's perfectly coordinated maneuvers.

The Centuriae and the Kurou Hougans were unable to reach the noesis barrier and create a breach.

If the battle continued at this rate, the defenders were almost certainly going to win.

"It feels like I don't have any extraordinary insight about conducting sieges." Masatsugu shrugged and said, "Unlike Caesar, the siege expert, I can't think of any clever strategies. But ultimately... There's no need to demolish an entire castle in a siege. It's enough to just breach it at one location."

"Yes, which is why specialized weapons would be transported in ancient times to break fortification walls."

Rikka conversed with Masatsugu from atop their wyverns.

Ancient siege weaponry included battering rams and catapults that threw giant rocks. And since the medieval age, places around the world started using gunpowder and explosives.

"So as modern humans, we will be using this thing as a battering ram?"

As soon as Rikka murmured, *the object* started its attack from the sky.

Simply stated, "*a flying giant military ship* emerged from the thick clouds, hurtling towards Suzaku Gate like a crashing meteor."

The ship's total length was 183m with a loaded displacement of 15 thousand tons.

The British destroyer with its streamlined body designed for stealth, the *Tintagel*, finally entered the stage— The magnificent and massive ship descended from the sky. Confronted with this dramatic catastrophe, even the three-eyed phoenix could not help but squawk.

Kwehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

The giant phoenix with a wingspan of seventy meters was originally hiding

behind the noesis barrier that covered Suzaku Gate's surroundings to protect itself and the stronghold— Now, the phoenix went through the barrier, coming *outside* of it.

It probably knew that emergency measures were in order. The three-eyed phoenix's gigantic body exploded with an intense blaze, turning into a humongous "firebird."

The firebird charged at the *Tintagel*, trying to stop the ship's plunge.

However, the flying destroyer was escorted by a defending force. A hundred and fifty Kamuys were flying beside it in a spherical formation, Akigase Rikka's army.

These hundred and fifty Legions raised their rifles and shot in volleys, attacking the giant fiery phoenix with a curtain of gunfire.

The Centuriae and Kurou Hougans that had started the battle also fired in volleys to pin down the giant phoenix.

The humongous firebird was bathed in countless scorching beams and forced back momentarily.

Like crashing thunder, the large destroyer *Tintagel* smashed into the noesis barrier of the second tutelary fort, Suzaku Gate.

Part 3

Weapons such as cruise missiles and ICBMs existed once.

After the conclusion of the Second World War, the US military had greatly promoted the efficacy of these weapons.

But during the practical application stage, the US military ran into substantial setbacks. This was an age when noetic disruption could easily cause destructive interference against the likes of infrared and radio waves. Projectile weapons unable to strike targets accurately without guidance—In the end, they became "useless" weapons.

Moreover, Legions had become the modern mainstay weapon.

They were able to resist "non-mystical attacks" with high probability.

Noesis barriers shared the same property. Hence, the various nations did not devote much of a budget towards missile research.

But in recent years, trends had shifted slightly.

Humans had developed a system allowing ifrits to take over the firing of missiles and the management of guidance, thereby imbuing attacks with mystical properties. The destroyer *Tintagel* was also equipped with such a system.

...Painstakingly, Masatsugu and company had transported the *Tintagel* to the sea near Ogawara City.

It would be possible to keep the ship by the shore to serve as "stationary artillery." Ogawara was only sixteen kilometers away from Lake Ashi in terms of map distance. The weapons on the destroyer could easily strike Hakone Checkpoint.

However, one would not expect mere artillery to have much of an effect against the Four Gods.

In that case—Masatsugu thought of an exceedingly simple method. He decided to ram the Four Gods using the destroyer *Tintagel* to see what would happen.

Needless to say...

A military ship powered by artificial ectoplasmic fluid and a fluid reactor did not have the ability to fly in the air.

"I thought this idea was beyond ridiculous when I first heard it," Rikka admitted without pretense.

"Using Legions to transport a ship—That would be too difficult. But on further thought, assuming you could summon five or six hundred Kanesadas..."

The large destroyer had flown from the Ogawara coast to Hakone at a speed of sixty kilometers per hour.

The source of thrust was red-purple, and hundreds of them to boot.

Every red-purple source of thrust was positioned against the hull and the sides of the *Tintagel*.

These sources of thrust were Tachibana Masatsugu's Kamuy variant, a total of seven hundred "Kanesadas." For this day, Masatsugu had obtained a large amount of ectoplasmic fluid.

The Shinsengumi Vice-Commander's current Chevalier Strength had reached 722!

"Fortunately, this plan worked. It was not just our wishful thinking."

"Indeed, I'm relieved too."

As Kamuys, the Kanesadas were Legions with a relatively small build.

However, they were still eight-meter-tall giants, after all, and fierce winged giant soldiers to boot. They were strong enough to lift large trucks over twenty tons in weight and toss them.

Furthermore, they were able to produce thrust comparable to their arm strength—

Currently, Masatsugu and Rikka were riding wyverns, watching from the sky to see if their unusual plan would succeed.

...The *Tintagel* broke through the dark clouds and appeared in the sky over Hakone.

...The large destroyer began to fall, crashing towards the second tutelary fort's noesis barrier.

...The seven hundred Kanesadas separated from the ship, leaving the rest to inertia.

...Part of the defense force started to shoot, but even a screen of gunfire could not stop the military ship's plunge.

"Our naval personnel are all weeping. Their original plan was to unlock the noetic system so that they can make perpetual use of this ship to bolster their forces."

"No need to be too attached. We can just steal another one if a chance comes up."

After giving a barbarian's response, Masatsugu asked, "How is the genie doing?"

"She should be fine. Although Sakuya seems unreliable, if you give her a specified duration and ask her to work hard for ten to twenty minutes, she can deliver rather well."

"I see, that does seem to be the case."

The *Tintagel*'s prow struck the noesis barrier, producing a thunderous crash. The golden dome of noetic energy became distorted.

The Four Gods did their best, trying to stop the massive 183m-long ship.

Immediately...

A giant explosion occurred from the prow of the *Tintagel* all the way to its center.

The British cutting-edge destroyer's fluid reactor had lost control, impossible to bring back to stability.

"Sakuya has succeeded in destroying the reactor core."

Rikka smiled, for she had brought Sakuya along precisely to fulfill this task.

The spirit left on the ship was probably erased in an instant. Since it was merely an avatar, it could revive itself any time as long as the principal image remained intact at Suruga.

The fierce explosion became the final straw to break the camel's back.

The ship crashed halfway through the noesis barrier, embedding itself in the tutelary fort's interior. The massive ship, 183m long, slid into the enemy position in a dramatic turn of events.

The ship's body also collided with the star-shaped perimeter wall surrounding the tutelary fort.

Needless to say, the ship smashed the wall before finally coming to a stop.

The noesis barrier had exhibited perfect defense until now. However, the barrier was shattered and broken around the hole created by the *Tintagel* with huge cracks forming on the golden dome.

Legions entered the cracks one after another to invade the tutelary fort's interior.

Those Legions were the coalition force formed from the Centuriae who had been attacking the second tutelary fort, Suzaku Gate, and the Kurou Hougans led by Tachibana Hatsune.

"Masatsugu-dono, the plan has been a success of sorts."

"Thanks to everyone's help, we managed to transport the ship to Ogawara."

As mentioned previously, the map distance from Ogawara to Lake Ashi was sixteen kilometers.

Flying at a speed of sixty kilometers per hour meant traversing the distance in ten-odd minutes.

Furthermore, the *Tintagel* was still capable of sailing even though its noetic system was locked down by Morgan le Fay's power.

Working overtime, Tōkaidō disguised the ship's body and sailed it to

Odagawara.

For this purpose, they kept attacking the Izu Peninsula and nearby waters to cause massive disruption to the Suruga Bay surveillance network, thus ensuring smooth passage. Once preparations were complete, the *Tintagel* passed through the surveillance network to reach the vicinity of Odagawara directly.

General Wei Qing was also acting as bait to draw the Black Prince's attention.

Only after confirming that the Black Prince and the Knights of the Garter had shown up at Seiryuu Gate did they start transporting the *Tintagel* by flight.

The idea itself was simple and stupid, but actually carrying it out required meticulous care.

"Now then—It is up to Her Highness and Tachibana to infiltrate and see if they can accomplish their mission successfully..." Rikka said quietly and Masatsugu nodded deeply.

Meanwhile, at the first tutelary fort, on the roof of Seiryuu Gate's nation-protecting keep...

"Tachibana-dono, do know that my side is not unprepared."

Edward the Black Prince laughed eerily.

Having witnessed Tachibana Masatsugu's bold but ridiculous ploy, the Black Prince laughed heartily. But immediately, he returned to a solemn expression. Gazing the video played by the spirit Morrigan of the battle situation at the second tutelary fort Suzaku Gate, he said, "Will your plan actually succeed?"

Edward offered taunting words to his formidable foe, who was a dozen or so kilometers away.

Part 4

Hakone's second tutelary fort, Suzaku Gate.

Inside its star-shaped perimeter walls, Legions of three nations were fighting in a great chaotic battle.

The defenders were two hundred Crusades, mainstay Legions of the British Empire. Conversely, the attacking side invading the noesis barrier was a coalition force belonging to Rome and Japan.

The main force consisted of a hundred and twenty Centuriae, commanded by two of General Wei Qing's subordinates.

Seventy Japanese Legions were "Kurou Hougans." This team had attacked together with the silver Roman army after Tachibana Hatsune summoned them at Ogawarajou. The tops of their heads were elongated like *eboshi* and they wore red armor with white robes.

Legions of three nations were swinging their blades, firing their scorching beams, doing everything they could to slaughter the enemy.

Most striking of the warriors were the Kurou Hougans.

Kamuys were especially noted for their agility among Legions. However, the avatars of Kurou Hougans Yoshitsune were able to move as light as a swallow in addition to their swift agility.

Jumping in a fluttering manner, the Kurou Hougans dodged the swinging blades of the Crusades repeatedly.

The agility they exhibited was akin to how Ushiwakamaru had toyed with Musashibō Benkei at Gojō Bridge. The Kurou Hougans were not only swift and nimble, with flowing footwork, but could even evade attacks from behind by jumping forward or using spectacular side steps, as though they had eyes on the back of their head.

It was hard to imagine these eight-meter-tall giants displaying such tengu-level martial arts.

When they attacked, their blades moved swiftly and sharply. Their bayonets instantly severed the Crusades' jugulars, easily penetrating the gaps in their armor.

That being said, it was hard to avoid stray shots on a chaotic battlefield.

A fair number of Kurou Hougans were hit due to bad luck or during balance recovery, and died to the blades of the Crusades.

However, these Kurou Hougans were quite a fighting force to be reckoned with, for an army belonging to a novice Chevalier.

While the Kurou Hougans were fighting bravely, their commander was accompanying the beautiful liege to sneak underground.

"Princess, we're approaching the goal!"

"I suppose there are no soldiers on guard duty, but let us proceed with caution!"

"Understood!"

Taking her personal lady-in-waiting and Chevalier Shiori had entered an underground tunnel.

Every tutelary fort was equipped with an underground water shrine and the four tutelary forts of Hakone were no exception. In case of emergencies, tunnels large enough for eight-meter-tall giant soldiers were built to allow Legions to swiftly recover from depletion of mystical power.

Of course, the tunnel went straight from ground level to the subterranean water shrine.

The two girls were each riding a Kurou Hougan. Hatsune was standing on one Kurou Hougan's shoulder while Shiori was on the other's palm.

The underground tunnel only had scattered orange lights for illumination.

The two Kurou Hougans were hovering, following the downward sloping

tunnel. After a couple hundred meters, they were greeted by a wide open space.

"We reached the water shrine!" Hatsune cried out in joy.

The tunnel reached the top of the vast water shrine. Below them was a great reservoir of ectoplasmic fluid. Paths crisscrossed all over the surface like a chessboard and there was an entrance into the bath at the back.

Dozens of massive columns stood towering from the bottom of the reservoir up to the ceiling. Every column was uniform in size with a diameter of six or seven meters.

Stylistically, these giant columns were Corinthian from ancient Greek architecture.

"The ifrit protecting the tutelary fort—Its divinity baseplate is hidden inside a certain column in the water shrine. In the case of Imperial Japan, since this is always in a fixed spot, I will use noetics to search."

"Then let's go down there first, Princess!"

Hatsune directed the two Kurou Hougans to descend.

The landing spot was a path on the reservoir. The Legions instantly lowered the two girls. Just as Shiori was about to focus noesis on swiftly locating the divinity baseplate...

She sensed extremely ominous noetic waves from close by.

If one were to describe using a color, it would be "black." Shiori felt a chill down her spine. The noetic waves were filled with all sorts of negative elements—coldness, malediction, evil energy, curses.

"What is this...?"

"P-Princess!"

Just as Shiori was feeling intrigued, she heard her personal lady-in-waiting shout urgently.

Now she finally understood the noetic waves earlier were emitted at Hatsune. Shiori turned her head back, only to see the normally lively and cheerful girl

standing frozen on the spot, her eyes unfocused.

Hatsune's entire body was entangled by negative noetic waves.

The one releasing these waves was a beautiful blonde maiden.

Her exquisite face was like a fairy's with an astoundingly pale complexion. Dressed in a pitch-black coat, this sort of funeral-like attire was a perfect match for her.

Rather than appearing suddenly, she had used stealth noetics to conceal herself.

The fact that Shiori had failed to sense her stood testament to her substantial prowess. The noetic waves restraining Hatsune were exuding from this young woman's body.

"Who are—"

Shiori was about to ask for her identity, but stopped halfway.

"Though I do not know your name, I presume you must be a princess of the British Empire. If necessary, I am willing to introduce myself first..."

"That would not be necessary."

The blonde's voice was crystal clear, no less exquisite than the beauty of her face.

"The British Empire has not neglected to gather intelligence. How could we possibly be unaware of Lady Fujinomiya Shiori? That being said, must I introduce myself?"

A smile bloomed on the girl's face, but there was no impression of cheerfulness.

Her essence was more akin to a mysterious bewitching rose, stars in the dark night, or faint moonlight.

"My name is Alexandrina Eleanor. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

"I knew it, the British Three Lions'—"

"I suppose I would be considered the daughter of the Three Lions. Pray forgive me but I cannot divulge the number of my siblings. I am quite surprised

that you know of my existence, Lady Shiori."

The blonde maiden spoke cordially.

But held in her right hand was a dangerous instrument, a large-caliber revolver. This object looked extremely out of place in her pale and slender hand along with that cordial expression on her face.

The gun was aimed at Shiori's chest.

Suppressing her fear, Shiori said, "From Rikka-sama and Hatsune, I have heard about a masterful user of magic who made an appearance in Suruga..."

"You were able to guess from this scant information? You are truly as clever as they say, Lady Shiori."

Princess Eleanor smiled with delight.

Reportedly, she had easily infiltrated the Suruga tutelary fort after the Restoration Alliance had started the war, using a mysterious bewitching skill to control Rikka, and even transformed in front of Hatsune to flee.

Only a royal princess would have the ability to wield special powers of this sort.

"Lady Eleanor... Did you pray to your own father for a wish? You obtained taboo powers of enchantment in exchange for your own lifespan."

The British princess smiled and did not answer.

However, Shiori's guess was current. In the present times, praying to the sacred beasts "to grant magical powers" was the only way to obtain abilities of that level.

Furthermore, this was different from a one-time wish such as praying for the descent of a Resurrectee.

How many decades of life were needed to obtain "versatile magical powers" that could be used repeatedly?

Princess Eleanor probably did not have long to live...

Even so, she maintained her sultry smile while pointing the merciless gun at Shiori. What a witch, literally.

"Are those powers the reason why you knew of my arrival?"

"What do you think? I simply felt a little sense of foreboding in my heart. A while ago, I was having a private discussion with my good brother—Prince Edward—about the most likely threats to Hakone. For example, a princess inheriting Lord Tenryuu's blood would probably be able to devise an unexpected plan."

"A little sense of foreboding, you say...?"

"Fufufufu. A woman's intuition is very terrifying, and I am a witch on top of that. When it comes to matters related to the occult or magic, my intuition is almost akin to an oracle."

"....."

"For the past few days, this sense of foreboding did not go away, which is why I tried coming to Hakone to guard the location that worried me the most—As expected, I ran into your grand arrival, Lady Shiori."

"Now that I have heard your explanation, my mood cannot be any worse."

Shiori relied on upbringing to resist the urge to click her tongue. Putting her facade aside, she spoke a few harsh words.

"Who could have thought that my plan would be foiled by a witch's intuition...?"

"Oh my, Lady Shiori, aren't you a master in mystical skills too?"

"My skills are nowhere near as underhanded as yours. Lady Eleanor, your magical powers are basically cheats in the realm of human calculation and conflict."

"That I do agree... By the way, Lady Shiori."

Click. Eleanor's thumb cocked the revolver's hammer.

"It is time for us to chat about the future. Would you and the lady knight over there be so kind as to join my side as guests? Or must I use this rather rude instrument to take you both away by coercion?"

"I am terribly sorry, but I have trouble falling asleep if I were to switch

pillows."

"Please rest assured. Upon the honor of the British Empire, I promise to find bedding and a bedroom satisfactory to you. Cast aside your worries and follow me now."

Confronted with the smiling Eleanor, Shiori was in quite a conundrum.

Her bodyguard Hatsune was immobilized the whole time. So were the two accompanying Kurou Hougans. It was like they were bound and restrained.

Shiori was not confident of victory in a contest of noetics or mystical powers.

Had she no other options but to abandon her ambition and plans to follow the British princess' orders obediently...?

"I—"

Frustrated by her own helplessness, Shiori's voice was trembling.

"Fufufufu, don't kill me with laughter. You think this level of magic will allow you to take Imperial Japan's princess? Over my dead body."

Underground of the second tutelary fort, Suzaku Gate, on the shore of Lake Ashi—

Someone who had no business coming to the water shrine had suddenly appeared. Her name was Rindou-sensei, and she was a reclusive figure of remarkable caliber, akin to Shiori's very own Zhuge Kongming, if one were to use a Three Kingdoms analogy.

Part 5

A few days ago, Tachibana Hatsune was lectured by someone she met for the first time, criticizing her for lacking know-how on selecting alcoholic beverages.

The trouble was that Hatsune was still a minor. She had not the slightest clue how to judge the quality of alcohol. She also did not know how drinkers thought. Hence, she decided to use the simplest solution of "outsourcing."

One after another, Hatsune phoned her Tachibana relatives who were living in the Suruga area.

"Hello, Uncle? Please send all the 'fine wine' you've got at home to the Fuji tutelary fort. The princess needs them. Don't even think about withholding the good stuff, or else I'll report you to the princess and tell her to condemn you!"

As a result, Hatsune received her alcohol the following day.

The Tachibana clan had no lack of ruffians and were hearty drinkers whose alcohol tolerance matched their martial strength and valor. The fine liquor treasured by these men was all shipped over to the Fuji tutelary fort by military transport vehicles for Hatsune.

In total, there were at least ten big crates.

This included limited-production local beers, sake of all varieties from standard up to the rare stuff of dreams, imported whiskey that would be a rarity anywhere in the world, thirty types of "Grand Vin" that had been snatched from a wealthy household's cellar, and an extremely rare collection of shouchuu. Everything was of the finest quality, coveted by discerning drinkers.

Previously, Rindou-sensei had declined Shiori's repeated invitations to come to Suruga, citing "too much of a bother" as her reason.

Precisely due to having such a personality, Rindou-sensei moved directly into the Fuji tutelary fort's barracks and "could not be bothered to leave" after

seeing so much fine liquor, spending her days locked up in the barracks, savoring the alcohol alone.

After that, the day to attack Hakone arrived.

By her protege's side, Rindou-sensei paid extra attention to Shiori than usual.

Rindou-sensei had accompanied them to Ogawarajou too. Along the way, she was drinking from a stainless steel hip flask containing a phantom sake of limited availability called "Godslayer!"

The slightly tipsy mentor had stayed in the castle. She was supposed to simply see the princess off from there.

However, she unexpectedly appeared at the second tutelary fort, Suzaku Gate, to intervene between Eleanor and Shiori.

"Rindou-sensei..."

Shiori breathed a sigh of relief and called out her mentor's name.

This young girl, who looked like she belonged in elementary school, with a blue kimono and blue hair, was undoubtedly Rindou-sensei. As for her unanticipated arrival, Shiori was not surprised.

Rindou-sensei was capable of teleporting like pipe foxes or sprites if she wanted to.

Elusive and wielding powers of great potency and versatility were precisely Rindou-sensei's traits.

"Hmph."

Rindou-sensei glanced at the immobilized Hatsune and said, "Charm noesis that captures Chevaliers, turning them into servants—You are using quite an interesting technique. Nevertheless, it is useless against the princess and me, since *we are not knights*, after all."

"You found out at a glance... Yours are truly discerning eyes of wisdom."

Eleanor smiled then acted swiftly and deftly.

She raised her right hand and suddenly shot, clearly very used to handling guns. The deadly bullet flew at Rindou-sensei's young face—

But it was deflected before it could hit.

"A noesis barrier..."

This time, it was Eleanor's turn for surprise to fill that pretty face of hers.

Rindou-sensei's petite body was glowing white faintly, and the light deflected the bullet. Furthermore, a snake was coiled around Sensei's blue kimono.

The silver-white snake flickered its tongue while atop Sensei.

The snake was two meters long with sharp eyes the color of rubies.

"A little snake that activates a noesis barrier... This pet wouldn't happen to be an ifrit, would it? From what I can see, you are something like a spirit, aren't you?"

"Hmph, stop wasting time on such inane matters."

Rindou-sensei conjured a fan into her hand as though performing a magic trick. Opening the closed fan, Rindou smiled and declared haughtily, "Though I am a very lazy person, I happen to be diligent at telling others to do my bidding. O daughter of lions, let my proxy punish you, go!"

"Good grief~ You're such a slave driver, Sensei!"

Immobilized all this time, Hatsune suddenly sprang into action.

Just now, the instant when Sensei had opened her fan forcefully, the noesis binding the novice Chevalier had vanished like a puff of smoke. This was due to Rindou-sensei's magical powers.

With a great swing of her arm, Hatsune threw something at Eleanor.

"But at least it was worth it for me to offer so much fine liquor as a gift!"

"Guh!"

Eleanor jumped away reflexively to dodge the blue object that Hatsune had thrown.

It was a blue scroll. For the sake of haste, Hatsune had thrown the physical manifestation of Kurou Hougan Yoshitsune's Appellation, the blue scroll, at Eleanor.

Last time, Hatsune had used the same attack to distract the witch Eleanor when she showed up at Suruga.

Unlike last time, Hatsune still had other measures available.

"Kurou!"

A winged giant soldier standing behind them also moved. One of the two Kurou Hougans. Its gigantic body, almost eight meters tall, raised its bayonet rifle with lightning speed like a tengu.

The muzzle instantly released a beam, firing ten shots in an instant.

"Father, grant me the power of your blessings!"

Just as the Kurou Hougans opened fire, Eleanor transformed into *a black eagle*.

The beautiful maiden swiftly turned into a bird of prey. She had used this transformation skill at Suruga too.

Eleanor flew into the air, dodging the ten consecutive flashes of light. Immediately, ten pillars of water shot up violently in the water shrine with great splashes.

The ten flashes of light had shot the water surface of the artificial ectoplasmic fluid.

Turned into an eagle, Eleanor flapped her wings and soared, escaping the water shrine through the opening in the ceiling and into the underground tunnel that Shiori and her entourage had used to enter.

Only Japanese girls, utterly drenched, were left at the scene.

"That girl reacts so quickly, just like last time."

Hatsune sounded disappointed. The other party's reflexes were like a beast's. As fellow princesses who had inherited the blood of sacred beasts, Eleanor's reflexes and athletic ability was far superior to Shiori's.

"Thanks to her swift escape, we are saved."

Rindou-sensei stuck out her tongue, trying to get the last drop of liquor from her upside-down hip flask.

"To be honest, my magic is about to run out."

"Why, Sensei?"

"Without alcohol, I have neither mood nor magic. When I no longer feel tipsy, this thing will disappear too."

"...So basically, it's like the drunken fist?" Hatsune asked in puzzlement.

The silver-white snake, coiled around Rindou-sensei until now—the miniature manifestation of the ifrit Fukuryuu—vanished spontaneously.

Now that there was no one to disturb her, Shiori focused her mind to enhance her senses.

After concentrating for around sixty seconds, she noticed signs that the divinity baseplate was hidden in a certain pillar. Next, she was going to try out the enchanted ceremony Sensei had taught her.

"Gold does not fear trials of flame. Heroes do not fear trials of hardship. Abandon all hope, ye who enter this door."

Shiori recited the mantra as an imperial princess.

Today, Hakone's sky was gray and dim.

On clear days, it was possible to see Mount Fuji in the northwest, thirty kilometers away. Currently, dark clouds were shrouding the sky, with sounds of rumbling thunder.

These were warning signs of a cataclysm about to rock the heavens and the world.

The three-eyed phoenix in the air over Suzaku gate—

The eyeball on the phoenix's head was proof of Morgan le Fay's control. However, the third eye suddenly vanished, replaced by a "皇" character, which had meanings of "emperor" or "imperial."

Hakone's second ifrit had turned to the Japanese imperial family's control.

"I hereby order you, Suzaku, subordinate kin of the sacred beast, Lord Tenryuu. Take what I, Fujinomiya Shiori, say as the decree of my grandfather, Lord Tenryuu, and swear absolute allegiance."

Transmitting noetic waves from the underground water shrine, Shiori commanded Suzaku.

Her body became drained and her legs lost strength. She was about to collapse and faint on the ground any moment.

This was probably the price of invoking the master-servant enchanted ritual by borrowing the mighty name of her grandfather, Lord Tenryuu. The vitality she had lost was perhaps equivalent to a year's lifespan.

...In fact.

Ever since the descent of sacred beasts upon the world, similar transactions have been taking place all over the world.

Starting from the latter half of the nineteenth century, the world underwent momentous changes. Women who had been wedded to sacred beasts, or their children who inherited the bloodlines of sacred beasts, would consume their life in exchange for obtaining mystical powers for their country.

Examples included Legions, artificial ectoplasmic fluid, ifrits, retainer beasts, noetic control, water shrines, fluid reactors...

Presently, Princess Shiori had taken control of the giant phoenix that protected Hakone.

She commanded, "O Suzaku, release all your noesis and go to sleep. I grant you special permission to give up your mission of protecting Hakone for the time being."

In the sky over Suzaku Gate, the golden phoenix howled loudly.

At the same time, its gigantic body, with a wingspan of seventy meters, released a golden aura.

This light was noetic energy, which was originally colorless and intangible. Excessively powerful noesis would exhibit color visible to the naked eye.

The golden noesis rushed into the sky that was filled with dark clouds, expanding like a display of aurora borealis.

The noesis presented to the heavens dispersed and vanished like smoke. The formerly golden phoenix changed color too, turning into a vivid fiery red.

Vermilion was precisely the rightful appearance of the ifrit Suzaku.

This change precipitated a chain reaction. Shiori spoke solemnly, "The trump card defending Hakone, the Four Gods, was born by merging the noetic energy of Seiryuu, Suzaku, Byakko, and Genbu. Now that the noetic energy of one of the divinities, Suzaku's, has returned to the heavens, the Four Gods can no longer be sustained... Hakone has finally lost all its walls now."

These words constituted an oracle delivered by the Saiguu, the supreme shrine maiden of the Japanese nation.

At the first tutelary fort in the east, the three-eyed golden dragon turned back into the original Seiryuu.

At the third tutelary fort in the west, the three-eyed giant tiger with golden fur turned back into Byakko.

At the fourth tutelary fort in the north, the three-eyed golden turtle with a snake for a tail turned back into the black Genbu.

The noetic energy of the four-in-one union collapsed.

Of course, the British could no longer use ultra durable noesis barriers or meteorological decrees. The Four Gods Union had been disengaged forcibly, even making it impossible to keep the ifrits manifested.

The four ifrits vanished suddenly.

Hakone Checkpoint instantly lost its castle walls.

Chapter 6 - Two-Headed Dog

Part 1

"Morrigan, inform the defensive forces at each tutelary fort on my behalf."

After the merged divinity of the Four Gods vanished, Edward immediately issued orders.

"Tell them to keep defending their respective tutelary forts for two hours. Once this designated duration is over, each army will act at their own discretion depending on the changing circumstances."

"Affirmative."

The loyal spirit Morrigan nodded in response to Edward using the doll she was possessing.

They were on the roof of the nation-protecting keep at the first tutelary fort, Seiryuu Gate. Edward quickly walked over to a waiting wyvern.

"Very well.. It is time to get back to square one. I will take my personal guard, the Knights of the Garter, and leave this first tutelary fort. Morrigan, you come with me too."

"Affirmative. Are you going to converge with the main force, Prince?"

"Indeed, you know me well."

Seeing the subtle expression on Morrigan's face, Edward smirked.

...Despite losing his impregnable fortress, the superior officer seemed to be in excellent spirits. Edward was thankful for the leveled playing field, allowing him to have a showdown against Tachibana Masatsugu on equal terms.

Morrigan was appalled by the Black Prince's love of battle, but felt curious about how he would command his army.

"Let us set off, Morrigan. I have brought four hundred Legions to Seiryuu Gate, with eight hundred remaining at the central command center. A total of a thousand and two hundred Legions should be plenty enough forces. The Japanese enemies must know that the black knights of the British Empire will be the ones to dominate the Hakone battlefield."

Apart from the Garter Knights, there were another hundred and fifty-odd Crusades at Seiryuu Gate.

The Black Prince ordered them to defend the tutelary fort while he took his personal guard to converge with the "central main force." He was going to launch a vicious counterattack next, to destroy the enemy armies in the four cardinal directions respectively—

This was Edward's plan. However...

"Of course, you are going to hinder me, right? Tachibana-dono..."

Leading the four hundred Legions under his direct command, the Black Prince moved towards Oowakudani—

There was another ambush force there. Eight hundred Knights of the Garter were already detected. Leading a total of a thousand and two hundred Legions, Prince Edward was setting up his position in the sky over Mount Souun—

Retainer beasts such as aquilas and yatagarasus had returned with the above reports.

Needless to say, Tachibana Masatsugu was kept informed of such intel at all times.

However, there was one matter that needed to be discussed and settled prior to entering the battlefield. It would not be wrong to call it a negotiation. In other words, a meeting with the renowned general of Japan's "ally," the Eastern Roman Empire.

The key point was how to defeat the enemy's leader, Edward the Black Prince—

Riding blue wyverns, Masatsugu and Rikka headed to the rendezvous point in the sky over Oowakudani.

After the battle at Suzaku Gate, six hundred of Masatsugu's Kanesadas remained while Rikka's hundred and fifty Kamuys were virtually unscathed.

Meanwhile, riding a silver wyvern, General Wei Qing brought roughly four hundred and fifty Centuriae.

In order to hold the Black Prince's attention at Seiryuu Gate, Wei Qing had confronted the English longbow formation head on, losing over half of his army of a thousand as a result.

The rest of the Roman and Tōkaidō forces had stayed at the four tutelary forts in the north, east, south, and west.

Those forces were currently fighting the armies left behind by Prince Edward.

Currently, the hundred and fifty Tōkaidō Legions combined with the four hundred and fifty of Rome's to give a total of a thousand and two hundred.

Given the proportions, it would not be wrong for Tōkaidō to be in command. However, if the Roman army, which had sacrificed the most so far, refused to cooperate, this battle would be extremely hard to fight—That was how the proportions worked.

While thinking over these matters, Masatsugu reached the rendezvous point in the sky over Oowakudani.

Leading his Centuriae in a spherical formation, General Wei Qing arrived from the direction of Hakone Yumoto.

"Masatsugu-dono."

"Yeah, I'm going to talk to him for a bit."

Masatsugu gave Rikka a look and left the Tōkaidō army of seven hundred and fifty Legions. Riding his wyvern alone, he approached the Roman army of four hundred and fifty. Who knew what would come out of his discussion with General Wei Qing?

The two of them met in the sky over Oowakudani.

Wei Qing said very candidly, "I am willing to cooperate with your plan, Masatsugu-dono."

"...Now that's really helpful of you to be so accommodating."

That being said, Masatsugu could not help but grumble this time.

"Since I haven't even told you the plan, aren't you agreeing too quickly?"

"Please rest assured, this is the power of my Feat of Arms."

"What?"

The ability to reenact mighty feats from the battlefields of one's past life—

Such was the special power of Feat of Arms. However, what kind of ability had Wei Qing invoked during this conversation? Masatsugu was greatly puzzled.

Wei Qing pointed at his own temple and explained. Normally low key, Wei Qing was speaking in a mischievous tone of voice for once.

"I have no idea whether my daily conduct resulted in karmic backlash, or I am simply afflicted with poor luck, but as a result, I am always surrounded by troubles outside of battle. Examples include unreasonable treatment from the upper class, or being forced to lead armies that are clearly weaker than the enemy..."

His words sounded like complaining, but Wei Qing's tone was filled with levity as though he were not talking about himself.

In fact, there was a gentle smile maintained on Wei Qing's face.

"Perhaps due to this, my *intuition* is especially sharp when it comes to matters of advance or retreat."

"Intuition?"

"Yes. My expertise lies in knowing when to advance or retreat, knowing where to move for better fortune and which positions are disadvantageous... All this is clear to me in a kind of premonition."

"You can really see that stuff?"

"This time, my intuition tells me that you hinted at is the most effective path to survival... This is precisely the effect of my Feat of Arms—Kanglong Youhui."

Wei Qing easily revealed his completely unassuming ability.

Masatsugu was very intrigued. Did this really count as a Feat of Arms?

Wei Qing smiled again and said, "There have been many eccentric people around me in the past. This includes an emperor who was a good judge of character, but had poor understanding of human hearts, the emperor's willful older sisters, obstinate generals, etc... Perhaps after being pushed around by those people for long years, I developed this kind of ability as a result."

"I see."

Masatsugu understood, but he was only half-convinced.

General Wei Qing having such an ability was probably true. Otherwise, he would not have obediently committed to Masatsugu's battle plan without knowing anything in advance.

However, a Feat of Arms purely for "improving intuition"—That was quite difficult to believe.

Masatsugu speculated that Wei Qing had exercised "temperance" in only telling part of the truth. The true effects of the Feat of Arms should be more powerful with intuition as merely the tip of the iceberg.

"General Wei Qing, if a chance arises, I'd really like to get to the 'bottom' of you some day."

"My true nature is not interesting at all. On the other hand, Tachibana-dono, your identity is far more intriguing."

"Me, you say?"

"The way you have fought your battles so far are only possible with a deep belief that your troops are the elite of the elite. Such are the types of tactics you employ, which take an excessively heavy toll on the soldiers."

"....."

"It is most likely that you hail from a strong nation, or perhaps you were a

general leading heroes of the most elite sort?"

"Speaking of which, you said the troops you led were old and weak, General?"

Faced with Masatsugu's question, the handsome general smiled wryly and admitted, "Yes, the emperor assigned cavalry to me by to subjugate the equestrian Xiongnu tribes... Unfortunately, the riders and horses were all raised within Han borders. Compared to warriors who spent their entire lives riding across the steppes—The difference was as great as between heaven and earth."

In any case, the matter of command was settled with unexpected ease.

Dozens of minutes later, the two of them finally faced off against Edward the Black Prince.

"Morrigan, it is time to begin."

"As you command."

Edward had divided the Knights of the Garter into two divisions.

First of all, nine hundred of them formed a wide wall formation as the "front rank." A couple hundred meters behind, the remaining three hundred were the "back ranks."

With the black knights in the back ranks all equipped with longbows, "mode anglais" was fully prepared.

Edward himself and Morrigan were among the back ranks. The genie had switched to a doll-size simulacrum and was sitting on the Black Prince's shoulder.

Looking out at the enemy position, Edward was quite surprised.

"Drawing a diagonal line across the battlefield... An oblique formation, huh? How old-fashioned to employ the tactic of Lord Epaminondas. Hohohoho, famed generals of past and present, oriental and occidental, all use the same methods, is that it!?"

Speaking of medieval knights, the majority of them were actually uncultured brutes.

The point of promoting chivalry was to impart a system of basic morals on these unruly men who frequented battlefields. So-called knights were nowhere as elegant as imagined by modern people.

However, there was a rare exception right here.

Having received an elite education since childhood as part of the English royal family, he was instructed in courtly elegance and etiquette.

Apart from mastery in martial training and the arts of war, he was also well-versed in Latin with deep knowledge in classical Greek and Roman texts—This was what Black Prince Edward was like as a person.

Now, he noticed that Tachibana Masatsugu had recreated a famous tactic from ancient Greece.

"We are about to have a real showdown against the prince. All units, assemble into a line to create a wall."

Now consider the coalition force between the Tōkaidō Fiefdom and the Eastern Roman Empire.

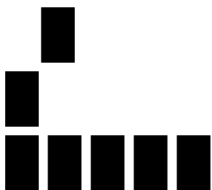
They had also entered a wide wall formation like the enemy. Both sides were in the sky over Mount Souun at Hakone, forming their own respective "wall" with over a thousand Legions.

However, the coalition force's wall was very different from the British side's.

Starting from the left and moving across, there were six hundred red-purple Kanesadas, then four hundred silver Centuriae, and finally a hundred and fifty blue Kamuys.

Along the entire line, only the Kanesadas on the left were intentionally arranged in a column.

Thus, the formation became an "L" with a protrusion on the left instead of a perfect horizontal line.





The column on the left consisted of the six hundred Kanesadas.

Instead of uniform ranks, this arrangement concentrated not only manpower but also the toughest troops on the far edge in extremely deep ranks. This tactic was known as the oblique order, a type of unbalanced formation.

Part 2

Back to the second tutelary fort, Suzaku Gate.

The great phoenix of the Four Gods guarding this fortress was already gone.

However, the hundred-odd Crusades stationed here by the Black Prince were still around, currently fighting the coalition force of Centuriae and Kurou Hougans.

They had probably received orders to stay in the tutelary fort and continue to draw the enemy's attention.

At this rate, things should be fine.

Relieved, Shiori decided to change the subject.

"...The oblique order is an ancient Greek tactic."

The Tōkaidō side had set up a simple tent as a temporary camp on the lawn inside the tutelary fort.

Shiori was sitting on a foldable chair in the tent with a blanket over her lap. Activating the master-servant enchanted ritual had depleted her stamina greatly.

Fortunately, she remained conscious and was still able to use noetic control.

Currently, she had sent reconnaissance yatagarasu to observe the showdown between Masatsugu and the Black Prince.

The battle situation was projected into the air for a live broadcast. On the screen, Tachibana Masatsugu had ordered the Legions to enter an oblique formation.

"Back then, the mainstream tactic was to deploy troops in phalanxes with wide ranks of equal depth. However, Epaminondas, the commander of the city state Thebes, deliberately used a much deeper phalanx on the far left and

succeeded in defeating a Spartan army of twice their number."

"Winning when outnumbered two to one!? That's amazing!" Hatsune's eyes glimmered brightly, very impressed. "But what I don't get is why it's a 'formation in a diagonal line'!"

"By concentrating elite troops on the left, the left side inevitably advances ahead. If the center and the right fail to keep up, the scattered forces would be subjected to either a frontal breakthrough or defeat in detail."

Consequently, the soldiers in the center and the right, which are advancing slightly slower, must follow the elite troops in the left—Shiori drew a diagonal slash in the air to explain.

"From overhead, it looks as though a diagonal line has been drawn on the battlefield from the top left to the bottom right."

"Princess, if Onii-sama knows this kind of sure-win tactic, that means he might be from ancient Greece!"

"This is undoubtedly impossible."

"Y-You don't have to reject my idea so decisively!"

"The essence of oblique order is not about 'drawing a diagonal line' but 'concentration of force on one side to be employed skillfully.' When deploying troops with this principle in mind, one would naturally choose similar formations."

After explaining the tactic in detail, Shiori added, "This has nothing to do with a commander's identity, geographic origins, or era."

"Oh I see now."

"On this occasion, it just happens to resemble oblique order, that is all."

"I get what you mean now, Princess. But from the tone in your explanations... Why do I get the feeling you already know Onii-sama's origins?"

"Is that so? I had no intention of insinuating that."

Hatsune pointed out the heart of the matter straight away, startling Shiori.

Acting as though nothing had happened, she hid her true feelings very

naturally. After observing Masatsugu's behavior for a while now, Shiori had come to her own conclusion.

However, she had no evidence. It was not yet time to announce her findings at the current stage.

It was imperative to focus on the battle at hand to reach a swift conclusion, so that they could hurry to Tachibana Masatsugu's aid as early as possible—

"By the way, Hatsune, Masatsugu-sama also mentioned that your power is absolutely essential to this battle. You must prepare yourself, alright?"

"Yes, Princess!"

"I shall muster my greatest spiritual powers... to foil Prince Edward's calculations."

Shiori knew roughly what the Black Prince was thinking.

He intended to defeat the two Resurrectees of Tachibana Masatsugu and Wei Qing at the center of Hakone before moving on, successively visiting the four tutelary forts in the four cardinal directions, to defeat the Roman-Tōkaidō coalition forces.

Hence, he had ordered the Legions stationed at the various tutelary forts to stick to defense.

Conversely, Shiori's side had to do the opposite.

They must swiftly defeat the defense forces at the four tutelary forts then head over to aid the Tachibana-Wei coalition force in the center, to encircle the Black Prince—

Fujinomiya Shiori was the key to this battle plan.

Taking a deep breath, she focused her noesis again.

Back the sky over Mount Souun...

Masatsugu's Tōkaidō-Roman coalition force versus Edward's British army.

Facing each other, separated by several kilometers, the two armies finally moved forward. If they were to continue advancing like this, they would enter

melee range.

Naturally, the two armies started by exchanging gunfire.

Capable of firing at a rate of ten shots per second, the bayonet rifles kept shooting, again and again.

Each side consisted of a great army, a thousand and two hundred strong. This implied a total of two thousand and four hundred rifles discharging scorching beams, producing a curtain of gunfire.

White protective barriers neutralized the endless beams.

The glow coming from both armies was precisely their means of survival. Unfortunately, many beams remained potent, striking the winged giant soldiers in their armor or body, puncturing them directly.

In this rifle showdown, the coalition force was holding a slight upper hand.

In other words, the united army of Kanesadas, Centuriae, and Kamuys were winning slightly.

The reason was simple. The three hundred Legions in the British back ranks had not participated in this contest of volley fire.

The black carcasses of the British Knights of the Garter kept crashing down one after another.

Naturally, the three hundred black knights did not remain still. They drew their bows and nocked their arrows of light, launching an archery offensive from the back.

"All archers, I am counting on you again."

Responding to Edward's command, the Garter Knights began to fire repeatedly at high speed.

Draw, nock, loose. Arrows flew with the sound of tearing wind.

Such was the nature of bows and arrows as a weapon, unlike rifles that shot with a pull of the trigger. The contraptions of modern convenience could fire at ten shots per second, while the English longbow could only reach a maximum rate of one or two arrows every ten seconds.

However, these arrows of light were capable of piercing protective barriers.

Even with their radiant glow for defense, the Legions of the coalition army could not stop the black knights' arrows.

Furthermore, the Garter Knights in the front rank had formed a "wall" to protect the three hundred black longbowmen, completely preventing the coalition army from retaliating against the back ranks.

Enabling the longbowmen to focus on firing was the essence of "mode anglais."

The marksmen in the back ranks raised their longbows at an angle to release their arrows. Tracing out parabolic trajectories, the arrows hurtled towards the coalition army's position.

One after another, many Legions, red-purple, silver-white, or blue in color, were shot down by the arrows.

They were clearly dying much faster than the British black knights. The British Empire's side was still superior in a shooting match...

However, the coalition army was not to be outdone.

Using an echelon formation, the Tōkaidō-Roman coalition's left column stood out especially.

The Kanesadas assigned to the left side were flying slightly faster than the Centuriae in the center and the Kamuys on the right.

With the left wing ahead, the entire army formed a diagonal "\ " shape.

In contrast, the Garter Knights on the enemy side were in the shape of a horizontal "-" line.

In a minute or two, the front rank of the black knights were going to clash with the leading Kanesadas head on.

"Kanesadas—the two hundred of you in the front—Draw your swords and charge."

"I knew it would come to this. Focus the rain of arrows on the advance party. Do not let them succeed, or else the samurai swords will disrupt our

formation."

The army of Kanesadas at the top left of the diagonal were many ranks deep.

The two hundred at the forefront accelerated and charged, causing the unit to protrude even further, closing in on the Garter Knights in one go.

The bayonet rifles in their hands all turned into the famed sword, Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada.

The Kanesada unit with drawn swords must serve as the vanguard to approach and cut down the British Legions, thereby disrupting the enemy's packed formation by creating numerous dead bodies.

Once a packed formation began to break, all that was needed was to focus attacks at the breach and the formation's collapse would be inevitable.

However, arrows continue to rain down.

The longbowmen of the Garter Knights focused their fire, trying to annihilate the Kanesada vanguard that had their swords drawn. The red-purple Legions swung their Japanese swords, deflecting the rain of arrows.

Blades and arrows clashed.

Almost a month ago, the Kanesadas led by Masatsugu had used the same method to defend against English longbows many times.

However, the situation today was different from last time.

"Tsk."

"Sure enough, the enemy is fatigued."

Masatsugu clicked his tongue whereas Edward grinned.

The Kanesadas' swordsmanship was clearly disorderly, lacking their original acuity.

Normally, Shinsengumi swordsmanship was capable of blocking the vast majority of arrows, but today, one out of every two arrows met their mark...

Dozens of Kanesadas crashed down from the sky, heavily damaged.

"Transporting the *Tintagel* was an excessive drain, huh?" Edward chuckled.

Odawara's shore was roughly sixteen or seventeen kilometers from Lake Ashi. Masatsugu had ordered his Kanesadas to fly while carrying a 183m-long large destroyer. Of course, this consumed substantial ectoplasmic fluid.

For Legions, this depletion of ectoplasmic fluid was equivalent to fatigue in humans.

No longer sharp in swordsmanship, the Kanesadas kept making mistakes they would not normally make.

"My archers, no need to pity them. Shoot with all your might."

Edward told his troops that this was the chance for victory.

The merciless rain of arrows kept slaughtering the red-purple swordsmen, inflicting substantial damage to the fatigued Kanesadas.

In the end, over half of the vanguard died before they could engage the enemy.

Even so, the echelon formation's sword-wielding vanguard finally approached the horizontal line of Garter Knights—

"All units, draw your swords. Show the enemy Hijikata Toshizō's swordsmanship."

In the ensuing battle, the famed blade and Hijikata Toshizō's swordsmanship were of paramount importance.

The remaining four hundred and seventy or so Kanesadas entered the flat seigan stance and rushed at the British black knights, the Black Prince's personal guard.

Unexpectedly...

"Shame be to him who thinks ill of it—The hundred of you engaging the red-purple Legions in the front, make use of shields."

The Black Prince recited holy words to invoke a Feat of Arms of the shield.

The Garter Knights and the katana-wielding Kanesadas clashed head on. The short inscription of "Honi soit qui mal y pense," resembling Latin, appeared on each shield wielded by the Garter Knights.

"My knights, you are protected by the insignia of the garter. Now raise your shields of justice to triumph over evil!" "

The Garter Knights resisting the Kanesadas head on were one hundred out of the entire army.

Their armaments transformed from the standard bayonet rifle to *rectangular shields*—not English longbows. The shields were almost the size of a Legion's body.

This was another of the Black Prince's trump cards and it had successfully defended against Tennen Rishin Style swordsmanship before.

However, the Kanesadas had no choice but to soldier on. Masatsugu ordered them calmly, "Forget about defense—Go."

A hundred British Legions had given up their rifles for offense to raise up giant shields.

In that case, there was no need to strike a balance between offense and defense. Just attack with the strongest slash at full strength. The Kanesadas swung their swords to chop at the "black knights with raised shields"—They used the stance of *hassou*.

The so-called *hassou* was a type of upper stance with the sword. Gripping the hilt, one would raise both hands to mouth level.

The vertical sword's tip would point at the sky and the clouds, thus in Tennen Rishin Style, its nickname was "the cloud-oriented sword"...

"Cut them down with all your might."

The Kanesadas kept chopping at the hundred shield-wielding Garter Knights.

They focused all their strength on their one sword strike without thinking about defense or follow up attacks.

However, the Japanese swords were almost always blocked by the shields of the holy knights. Some of the Japanese swords managed to cut into the shield's steel, but they were rare exceptions.

"Hohohoho, are samurai swords only capable of this much?"

"Try harder. You are the troops led by the man known as 'The Merciless.' If this is all you've got, watch out for the mockery you'll face in hell."

The commander of the holy knights smiled whereas the Merciless Vice-Commander calmly ordered the attack.

Responding to Masatsugu's orders, the Kanesadas lived up to their names as "demoniac children of the gods." Using hassou slashes, they attacked from behind their failed comrades or went over the heads of the troops in front of them—Fresh red-purple swordsman rushed out nonstop.

As for the Garter Knights, they raised their giant shields to cover their entire body.

The Kanesadas used their own bodies to smash into the shields or kicked to throw the British Legions off balance. Then seizing the opportunity, swordsmen from behind would rush forward, using their deadly swords to leave mortal wounds on the British Legion's body.

This method of fighting lacked the exquisite skill sought by the spirit of Japanese swordsmanship.

Instead, it more resembled "well-coordinated thugs used to street fighting in large groups."

This method of slaughtering enemies was unique to the Feat of Arms of Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada inherited from the Shinsengumi Vice-Commander Hijikata Toshizō. During a chaotic battle, one could not rely exclusively on *skillful swordsmanship*.

At the same time, this offensive was also planned by Masatsugu.

"Impressive as always, Tachibana-dono. Does the oblique formation take credit for this fierce offensive?" Edward muttered from the back of the British army.

While the soldiers in the front were locked in combat, troops in the back would rush forward to deliver a second strike, and a third, etc, fighting relentlessly to break the enemy formation—

Putting elite troops in a column with deep ranks had this effect.

And currently in a column, the katana-wielding Kanesadas had turned into a sword's tip to stab into the line of Garter Knights.

At this rate, the black knights' formation would not last for long.

However, the Black Prince had expected this as soon as he saw the enemy's oblique formation.

He said, "I knew long ago... You are a famed general capable of thrusting your samurai sword at my throat. Naturally, as a knight, I have prepared retaliatory measures as well."

Edward was flying on a wyvern mount.

He looked down at the melee battle taking place between the two armies. The Tōkaidō-Roman coalition in echelon formation was currently fighting the line of Garter Knights.

The protruding left side of the echelon formation was clashing violently with the right side of the line in a chaotic battle.

However, the other soldiers were separated by dozens to a hundred or so meters, and were exchanging gunfire without entering the chaotic battle at all.

Edward calmly observed the battle situation.

He was watching the melee contest between samurai and black knights.

Breaking through at that point would instantly overturn the battle situation—

"Upon a knight's honor... Pierce them."

The Plantagenet prince issued the order for death.

The three hundred Garter Knights in the back had been focused on firing their bows so far. Their armaments spontaneously turned back into the normal bayonet rifles.

Rising by a height of four hundred meters, they occupied the sky over the echelon formation.

The Black Prince commanded sonorously, "Knights of the Garter, charge at full speed with all your might!"

Edward had ordered a cavalry charge.

The cavalry charge was the favorite tactic of Richard the Lionheart.

Using the bayonets as "cavalry lances," the Legions flew towards the enemy at maximum speed to pierce Legion armor with the sharp blades. The impact and momentum of the charge was able to scatter the enemy. A so-called cavalry charge was to use hundreds or thousands of troops to conduct such an attack offensive—

This time, three hundred Garter Knights were used to launch a cavalry charge.

Unconcerned with harming friendly forces, Edward went as far as to issue a cruel order that attacked them as well.

The black meteors crashed towards the left wing of the echelon formation from four hundred meters above!

At the same time, Masatsugu issued a new order.

He could not help but smile when he saw that the enemy general was just as insane as he was. In a certain way, this also meant that they were truly good rivals.

"So we both came up with similar tactics..."

Immediately...

The Kanesadas and the Garter Knights that had started a melee battle, as well as the black knights charging at them, friend and foe alike—All of them were caught in an attack from the side.

This wave of attacks came from rifle fire of the hundreds of Centuriae and Kamuys on the Tōkaidō side.

Part 3

Concentrating troops in one location would raise their offensive power there.

Ultimately, this was the key principle of the oblique order. What would elite troops with superb offensive power do after killing the enemies before them? Simple, move on to the next.

For example, they could move to other enemies and ambush them from the back or the flank.

Then what about the other part of the army with "low offensive power"?

There was no need for ordinary troops to be excessively aggressive. They should delay participating in battle as much as possible while keeping up just enough to avoid getting left behind. The underlying condition was that they must stay within a certain distance of the rest of the army to prevent the enemy from isolating them.

Once they clashed with the enemy in melee, there was no need to worry about defeating the enemy either.

Maintaining stalemate was the key point. Ensuring their own safety and survival was the top priority. While this was happening, the "elite unit with superior offensive power" would defeat the initial enemies in front of them before turning to the rest of the enemies stalled by their "less powerful allies."

Then afterwards, the ordinary troops would attack aggressively, to surround and destroy the enemy army in concert with the elite unit...

This was the most ideal and offensive use of the "oblique order."

However, there were different applications depending on the battlefield and the commander. On this occasion, Tachibana Masatsugu had used his "elite unit of six hundred Kanesadas" cleverly as bait.

The enemy consisted of Prince Edward and the Knights of the Garter.

What if even the oblique order's concentration of force failed to break through the ranks of the black knights?

Tachibana Masatsugu had considered this pessimistic outcome and it was not paranoia.

After using the trump cards of katana-drawing and Tennen Rishin Style swordsmanship, the Kanesadas under his command still could not overcome the longbows and the shields of the Garter Knights so easily.

While they were locked in a struggle, the enemy even launched a cavalry charge— "Centuriae, switch the targets of your rifles for the time being."

"Do not worry about harming the Kanesadas... Rather, shoot them along with the enemy. It is imperative that you eliminate the Knights of the Garter that are fighting the Kanesadas!"

Wei Qing and Akigase Rikka issued their respective orders.

Earlier, they had received a messenger pipe fox sent by the top commander, Tachibana Masatsugu, asking them to proceed according to the original plan.

Their current forces were respectively four hundred Centuriae and a hundred and twenty Kamuys.

Just now, they had followed the forefront unit of Kanesadas to advance slowly towards the enemy while firing along the way.

Not too long ago, their rate of fire had dropped slightly.

The coalition army had suddenly changed course and accelerated during the minute or two when the enemy commander's attention was focused on the "Kanesadas of which every last one had drawn their katana," thus allowing them to move unimpeded— The mixed force of Centuriae and Kamuys rushed ahead to the left, accelerating all at once.

While the Garter Knights and the Kanesadas were locked in a fierce struggle, this force successfully took the position on their right flank, resulting in a formation in the shape of a diagonal slash.

Once in position, the coalition force opened fire continually.

Their target was the zone containing the shield-bearing black knights, the knights that had charge from above, and the Kanesadas that were chopping away, a very chaotic situation.

The Garter Knights in that zone were no longer in an orderly formation.

Without a packed formation, their protective barriers failed to provide much of an effect. The coalition force's attack from an unexpected angle dealt a severe and unprecedented blow to the black knights. Many Garter Knights crashed into the peaks of Hakone's mountains.

The Kanesadas were also shot down in the process.

With a drastic decrease in numbers on both sides, the two armies continued in a truly fierce melee battle—

"Let the status quo continue for now..."

Wei Qing murmured to himself. Riding a silver wyvern, he was soaring the sky over the battlefield. Silver-white Roman Legions could be seen fighting bravely everywhere.

The Eastern Roman Empire's mainstay Legion was called the Centuria.

Like the Japanese Kamuy, the Centuria was a Legion type of smaller build.

In contrast, the Garter Knight, based on the Crusade, was a size larger than the silver-white Roman troops. However, unlike the blue samurai, the Centuriae did not rely on agility to compensate for their size disadvantage.

Each Centuria was equipped with a huge square shield.

They defended against the black knights' shots and blades using their raised shields and would counterattack whenever the enemy tired— Rather than charge and attack aggressively, they would often defeat enemies by waiting for them to make the first move.

Despite their smaller build, Centuriae were extremely tough and resilient in mind, body, and shield. The fangs of their counterattacks were also extremely sharp. Such were the characteristics of the Centuria Legion.

The Centuriae specialized in defensive battles in secure and orderly formations without pushing forward too aggressively.

Relying on these traits, Wei Qing continued the protracted battle.

He said, "Tachibana-dono's destiny does not end here—Then there will be a chance for a reversal without requiring me to give fortune a *spin*..."

Surrounded only by Legions locked in fierce combat, there was not a soul around him.

Hence, no one heard his murmurs.

"At this rate... The battle favors us, the British. That is what I think."

A girl's adorable voice spoke next to Edward's ear.

The genie Morrigan was sitting on his shoulder. The capable adjutant looked like she was about to offer advice—But no, despite using a small doll dozens of centimeters tall, she somehow managed to shrug.

"Prince, you see things differently, yes?"

"So you see it too? Impressive. A mere spirit knows how to read my face, huh?"

"Your mental state is easily written in your facial musculature. Guessing is not difficult."

Even in the midst of a fierce battle, she still did not keep her harsh tongue in check.

Edward smiled wryly and focused his mind on sensing the battlefield. He was carefully counting how many Legions were fighting in the sky over Mount Souun in the heart of Hakone.

First of all, there were roughly eight hundred Garter Knights on the British side.

Of the Tōkaidō-Roman coalition, a hundred and sixty of the red-purple Kamuy variant, three hundred and forty of the Centuriae, and a hundred of the standard blue Kamuys remained—A total of six hundred or so.

The "red-purples" were not the only ones tired.

It was the same for the Centuriae because they had spent a long time at

Seiryuu Gate to keep Edward occupied.

This numerical gap of two hundred would only increase over time. However, Edward was still fired up for battle. Ambition and competitiveness made him cheerful.

He was deeply convinced that the opponent who had won his approval still had more tricks to play!

Back to Tachibana Masatsugu—

Currently, he was a slight distance from the battlefield where Legions of three nations were fighting intensely.

He rode his wyvern near the ground, flying along the ridge of Mount Souun. The remains of Legions killed in aerial combat were strewn all over the place.

This included Kanesadas, Centuriae, Kamuys, and Garter Knights.

In terms of proportion, the colors of red-purple and black dominated. This meant that the fighting between the red-purples and the Garter Knights was the most intense. Of all casualties, the Kanesadas were the most numerous.

As one would expect, Masatsugu's troops were mostly afflicted with arrow wounds.

The arrows of light shot by the Garter Knights did not disappear.

The arrows of light were still embedded in the Kanesadas. Some of the Kanesadas were shot in the head, chest, or neck, killing them. There were others who had arrows in their thigh, foot, or waist, immobilizing them. There were also many cases of flesh wounds in shoulders, arms, or surface damage to armor.

The majority of the Kanesadas were lying on the ground, unable to fight anymore.

Some were sitting collapsed on the ground limply, unable to even lift their head.

Having consumed vast amounts of ectoplasmic fluid, they were depleted in strength. Just as Masatsugu was satisfied with the current situation, he sensed

bloodlust so he pulled the wyvern's reins lightly.

Wyverns were intelligent retainer beasts. His flying mount noticed Masatsugu's intent and changed course to the right.

Several seconds later, something descended through Masatsugu and his wyvern's former position.

A beam and the noise of gunfire.

A Garter Knight approached, its bayonet rifle pointed at Masatsugu.

This black knight was not heavily injured. It was flying at low altitude only because the shock of a collision during battle had sent it down. The two eyes beneath the mask had evidently captured Masatsugu's figure.

The enemy realized that the noesis emanating from Masatsugu was commanding a great army.

Discerning that this human was the commander, the Garter Knight was planning to take out the army's head!

"Fine, I guess I'll have to deal with it."

Masatsugu was about to raise his personal sword to take care of the attacking enemy.

Just as he gripped the hilt of Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada, he heard an ally's voice.

"My Appellation of Onikiri Yasutsuna... O trenchant blade of universal renown!"

Spurring her wyvern to fly at full speed, Akigase Rikka charged at the British Legion.

She drew the treasured blade of Genji pedigree at her waist and recited the mantra of the Feat of Arms. Rikka also intended to slay the enemy soldier with her own hand.

A slightly wavy temper-line was visible on the two-feet-seven-inch blade.

In terms of dignified appearance, Onikiri Yasutsuna was superior to the Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada held by Masatsugu.

"Demonstrate to the world the martial feat of oni slaying once more!"

The peerless treasured blade, Onikiri Yasutsuna, was precisely the Appellation inherited by Rikka.

The targeted Garter Knight was swinging its bayonet rifle at Masatsugu and Rikka as though trying to swat two flying bugs.

...The British Legion's attack worked. The gigantic blade sliced through a blue wyvern's body.

The wyvern was bifurcated in one stroke, but the rider was no longer in the saddle. Exhibiting amazing jumping power, Rikka flew into the air, swinging her treasured sword of Genji pedigree.

"Yahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Rikka rushed at the Garter Knight's black mask and the treasured blade easily sliced through the enemy's face.

This strike combined a spectacular jump with excellent swordsmanship and physical prowess.

Mortally injured, the black knight's gigantic body began to fall, crashing violently into Mout Souun's surface. The Feat of Arms held by "the famous blade that had slain Shuten-dōji, the oni of Ooe-yama," was mystical swordsmanship allowing a human being to slay Legions personally.

However, having jumped into the air, Rikka would inevitably fall.

"Rikka-sama!"

"Counting on you, Masatsugu-dono!"

The two of them did not engage in redundant conversation. Masatsugu kicked the side of his wyvern.

The wyvern accelerated towards where Rikka was going to fall. Seeing that, the famous swordswoman and Governor General slowly sheathed her sword.

Smiling, she was calm and confident.

Two seconds later, Masatsugu released the reins in his hands and caught Rikka with both arms.

In other words, a "princess carry." Still smiling, Rikka wrapped her arms around the back of Masatsugu's neck.

Overcoming their crisis magnificently, the two of them felt compelled to praise themselves.

"It appears that... I must thank you properly, Masatsugu-dono."

"No, that won't be necessary. I'm the one who should thank you."

Exchanging pleasantries, they gazed into each other's eyes.

Masatsugu seated Rikka in front of him, instantly turning their physical contact into a hug. The noble daughter of the ruling house sat sideways on the saddle, leaning against Masatsugu's chest.

"Masatsugu-dono—"

Rikka was pressed intimately against Masatsugu's body.

Through the military uniform, Masatsugu could feel her softness and warmth.

It was early winter and the midslope region of Mount Souun in Hakone was at a fairly high altitude. Also, it was not sunny today and the two of them were flying in the air, riding a wyvern.

Naturally, the air and the wind were quite chilly.

Masatsugu's hypothermic body became even colder.

On the other hand, Rikka's body was quite warm. Simply hugging her felt very comfortable.

The physical bodies of Chevaliers were all like this. Strengthened by ectoplasmic fluid on a daily basis, their bodies were extremely healthy. There was no worry of hypothermia even under adverse conditions of this sort. Rikka herself was wearing just her usual military uniform without any winter clothing.

When resupplying ectoplasmic fluid through an embrace, the other party was obliged to undress.

However, even through the military uniform, Masatsugu was able to obtain substantial warmth today.

"Oh—E-Excuse me."

Rikka came to her senses and hastily unfastened her top buttons.

"What's the matter, Rikka-dono?"

"Pray forgive my negligence. In this situation, etiquette would dictate that I do this, wouldn't it?"

Rikka was probably trying to expose more of her skin.

She undid approximately half of the buttons of her uniform jacket and blouse. Of course, this was meaningless unless the parts in direct contact were fully disrobed.

Nevertheless, Masatsugu smiled. He was able to admire the exposed cleavage.

"I-Is this insufficient?"

"No, for me, this is truly wonderful."

"I am so glad..!"

Rikka smiled from the heart and hugged Masatsugu's neck tightly.

Her gorgeous black hair was giving off a fragrant scent. Sitting on the saddle together, whispering in each other's ear, this was a pleasure of a different sort.

Through their mutual embrace, Masatsugu was filled with ectoplasmic fluid inside.

This was all thanks to Rikka sharing her warmth with him.

"Let's go, my men."

Soon after, Masatsugu issued a command.

He was ordering the Kanesadas fighting desperately in the sky over Mount Souun, dragging their fatigued bodies to face off against the Knights of the Garter.



In addition, this included the Kanesadas that had *pretended* to crash and fled into the mountains— They had been struck by English arrows, but not to the point of critical injury. Some of these wounds did not affect combat. There were over two hundred Kanesadas in this category. Sitting or lying down, they had been resting on Mount Souun.

—One purpose of doing this was to return to the battlefield once Masatsugu resupplied in ectoplasmic fluid.

—The second purpose was to make the British misjudge "their upper hand" as being better than the true situation, luring them into advancing recklessly, so as to strike back at them at an opportune moment.

Masatsugu and Rikka's wyvern was flying in the midslope section of Mount Souuun.

Everywhere they went, red-purple Legions were using their swords as crutches to get up. The eyes behind their masks were burning with fighting spirit and bloodlust. Of the ones that had crashed into the mountain, more than half were simply "playing dead."

This method was a bit underhanded, more or less, but fair play was a luxury during wartime. Masatsugu smiled quietly.

After all, his army had spent a lot of energy moving the *Tintagel* before the battle.

"My men, the first ten minutes of the counterattack are the most crucial. There is no need to fight with reckless abandon. Instead, I want each of you to kill more than one black knight."

Masatsugu sounded more like a criminal leader inciting rioters than a general lecturing his troops. These calmly delivered words set the Kanesadas ablaze with fighting spirit.

"Fight for ten minutes with the surefire intent to kill—The battle will definitely turn in our favor. Go."

Back to the sky over Mount Souun.

Until a couple minutes ago, the red-purple Legions were all exhausted.

In a state of depleted strength, the Kanesadas were barely keeping up with the Garter Knights in a chaotic battle. However, they were now gradually gaining strength.

Swinging their Japanese swords, their movements across the battlefield had recovered their original acuity.

Moreover—Their numbers were clearly bolstered.

Less than a hundred and fifty red-purple Kamuys remained just a while ago. Now, the Black Prince and Morrigan counted again using noetic waves.

"Prince, the enemy had reinforcements. Currently, the red-purples number three hundred and one."

"Rather than reinforcements, they were simply playing dead earlier. Their goal was to lure us into advancing recklessly, so as to deliver a vicious counterattack for a more potent comeback," Edward explained to Morrigan.

The red-purple Legion reinforcements were flying from Mount Souun to join the aerial battle as though nothing had happened.

These reinforcements were not an ambush force placed in advance.

Rather, they were Legions that had been too tired to fight, crashed into the mountains, before "resurrecting" once more.

Otherwise, Edward's discerning eye would have seen through their deliberate act of "playing dead."

"Sure enough... Tachibana-dono has used some kind of method to replenish his Legions' ectoplasmic fluid during battle. I believe this must be an effect of his Feat of Arms."

"No need to return, to a water shrine?"

"I guessed this was a possibility when I watched his battle against my uncle. Now there seems to be no doubt. He dares to push his troops to the limit only because he possesses such a Feat of Arms. Even to the point of using exhausted soldiers as bait, so as to naturally lure the enemy into carelessness or misjudgment..."

Sitting on Edward's shoulder, the Morrigan doll was speechless in surprise.

However, she was the finest spirit of the British Empire, after all. Morrigan immediately brought her mind under control and asked Edward, "So, Prince... What countermeasures, shall we take?"

"No need for special countermeasures. All we need to do is keep fighting."

Edward asserted quietly.

"Do not forget that the Knights of the Garter are the elite of the elite. It would not be an exaggeration to call them Britain's strongest army. Have faith in them."

Edward clenched his fist as though trying to stop himself from getting agitated.

"Indeed, the tides have turned during these ten minutes. The enemy currently holds the upper hand. We must exercise self-restraint for now, then counterattack at an opportune moment—Victory is destined to be ours."

The thirty-centimeter-tall Morrigan was very surprised.

Edward said to her, "Truthfully... I actually have a trump card too, capable of firing up exhausted troops."

"Trump... card?"

"Indeed, it is almost time to invoke it—Listen to me, black lions of England's pride, I hereby order you to contravene knightly ideals."

Reciting an ominous mantra, the Black Prince unleashed the power of a taboo Feat of Arms.

His tone was solemn, like that of a devout man of the cloth.

"The road to the kingdom of God only opens to those who cast aside their human identity and return to being beasts. Knights of the Garter, I hereby authorize you all to unleash your hidden faces."

Part 4

Edward the Black Prince was elegant as a person and extremely chivalrous. Few would dispute such a statement.

Putting aside shortcomings of slight flippancy, he always adhered to strict discipline, striving for the "knightly ideal," making no exceptions in the way he treated his closest subordinates.

Hence, the renown of the Black Knight and the Order of the Garter was impeccable in Britain.

Edward's life was filled with the glory of victory. In addition to his ability as a commander, his qualities and principles as a knight were even more fascinating. Dying with regrets merely due to disease, he had never met defeat at anyone's hands.

He was virtually an invincible general of great renown. One could also call him a genius and a hero whose charisma transcended time.

However—

Were these characteristics alone enough to ensure his undefeated reputation?

So-called war was a cruel world filled with blood, violence, murderous impulse, malevolence, and hatred.

Waging war required massive military funds. Soldiers of old needed to be paid, unlike modern Legions. During the medieval age, there was no Charter of Chivalry to establish "universal rules to facilitate war's smooth operation." Under those conditions, terror and violence were essential for subjugating enemy territories. Money and supplies also had to be requisitioned from battlefields...

Capable as Edward was, he still could not escape these realities of war.

Confronted such situations, he was a man who dared to face reality. Well aware that such behavior ran contrary to his ideals, he was not afraid of getting his hands dirty.

Edward the Black Prince was undoubtedly England's hero.

However, to the people of France, he was the commander-in-chief of the invaders, the one ordering slaughter and plunder, and the "chevalier de noir" who engaged in massacre from time to time.

Edward often reflected upon his moniker.

"At least it is far better than being called the White Prince."

He would often mutter that to himself as a kind of self-mockery and reminder, tinged with a certain regret. He did not believe himself to be an untainted person, while on the conscience level, it was debatable.

In any case, he unleashed the mysterious reason for the "black" in the name of the Black Prince.

Now, his army went berserk on the battlefield of Hakone, giving off an aura of red noesis reminiscent of the color of blood.

"Impressive as always, my personal guard."

In front of the Black Prince, the Garter Knights began to engage in cruel carnage.

One of the Garter Knights fired two shots consecutively at close range then grabbed the head of a Centuriae that could no longer fight, crushing the enemy's skull in its left hand.

Another knight circled around to assault a Kamuy from behind, then kicked away the corpse that was about to crash.

There was one black knight that blinded a Kamuy by slashing its eyes, then proceeded to stab the enemy in the gut ten-odd times.

A Kanesada with two arms lost and unable to fight, struggling to stay afloat in the air, was fired upon by two Garter Knights, turning into swiss cheese...

The slaughter was innumerable.

On the battlefield, cruel carnage took place everywhere.

However, the violence currently employed by the Garter Knights was going too far overall, with a flavor of insanity. It would be no exaggeration to call them intoxicated by partaking in a bloodbath.

This was most likely a far cry from their usual behavior.

The Knights of the Garter were always impeccably elegant, similar to their commander.

Even on the battlefield, they would raise their bayonet rifles gracefully to fire in perfect unison to exhibit spectacular marksmanship.

Currently, these qualities were nowhere to be seen—

"I have heard of this Feat of Arms—Chevalier de Noir, by name only."

The doll possessed by the spirit Morrigan was sitting Edward's shoulder.

Her attitude remained calm, but the sight of the Garter Knights' vicious fighting was too shocking, completely impossible to avert one's eyes away.

"In the shared database in the military, there are records about you, Prince. Oddly enough, this Feat of Arms is listed by name only without detailed description... I always found it unbelievable."

"I deleted it, because it is not worth recording," said Edward indifferently. "Of all my Feat of Arms, this is the simplest and most boring. Consequently, the effect is intense on occasion—or rather, too intense."

"By effect, you mean..."

"Just as you suspect, it means ordering knights to fight as berserkers, reveling in slaughter. This raises their combat power by roughly 20%, but the drawback is that they are limited to crude actions. Unless I retract the order, they will fight with all their strength until depleted of ectoplasmic fluid..."

Despite holding an overwhelming advantage, Edward did not seem excited at all.



As a commander of troops, using this Feat of Arms necessitated extra care. Obligated to adhere dutifully to a knight's true path, he cautioned himself that this was a taboo power.

When a battle gradually reached stalemate, or the situation was about to go sour...

This could be considered a potent drug for producing an extremely intense effect if timed correctly.

"Now then, Tachibana-dono."

Edward's formidable foe was on this battlefield of splattering ectoplasmic fluid.

Calling out to his unseen enemy, he muttered, "Whether tactics for seizing victory or Feats of Arms... I believe I have used everything flawlessly. All I can do from this point onwards is to believe in my own order of knights. Do you have the ability to overturn the current situation?"

"I have borrowed all kinds of weapons to fight the Black Prince..."

Riding a flying wyvern, Masatsugu spoke quietly.

He touched the hilt of Izumi-no-Kami Kanesada at his waist.

"To think that at this juncture, the enemy pulled out an even more troublesome weapon. Furthermore, all of his weapons are his own."

Archers of Crécy, the holy shields of the Order of the Garter, a death-bringing Feat of Arms of slaughter.

Every Feat of Arms belonging to Edward the Black Prince was astounding in power. They also symbolized the many great military accomplishments to his name in the past. Great military accomplishments paired with an outstandingly talented general— Edward had virtually no blind spots. In terms of ability as a general, the Lionheart was far inferior to the Black Prince.

"That prince really is quite a remarkable man," Masatsugu praised his opponent generously.

Together with Rikka, he was riding a wyvern, roughly a hundred meters from

the battlefield of violent slaughter. Flying in the sky, they watched the chaotic battle from outside.

The Tōkaidō-Roman coalition were up against the berserk order of black knights.

Every four or five seconds, a Kanesada, Centuria, or Kamuy would be wounded, splattering blue ectoplasmic fluid in the process. Many of these were mortal blows, causing them to crash from the sky directly. The unfavorable tide of battle was clear to see.

"What comes next is an arduous struggle to see which side's troops are stronger."

Masatsugu analyzed the situation. He did not think his own army had reached its limit...

However, it was true that the battle was a difficult predicament. Tricky to deal with in the first place, the Garter Knights had obtained even greater power to go on a murderous rampage.

Unless he came up with a solution to counter this threat, defeat would be sealed.

"Rikka-dono, I will need to trouble you to accompany me a bit longer. I can't be certain how far my abilities can go... Regardless, all I can do right now is struggle to the bitter end."

"Is that so?" Leaning against Masatsugu's bosom, Rikka asked in puzzlement.

Sitting sideways on the saddle, she looked back. With her body and face oriented towards Masatsugu, she showed a mischievous look.

"The Tachibana Masatsugu I know is someone who would never lose to the Black Prince. For the past two months, I have been watching your battles with my very own eyes..."

Rikka gazed into Masatsugu's eyes and said, "I dare assert that you do not lose to that Englishman in any regard."

"Oh?"

"Well, the enemy is outstanding, Masatsugu-dono, but you are also his equal,

aren't you? But additionally, he has the embarrassing title of prince, so you definitely hold the upper hand here."

"I could very well be a prince in my past life, you know?"

"Simply judging from your character, Masatsugu-dono, I would surmise roots as a commoner, I suppose?"

"Now that you say that, I do feel the same."

"Using the name and title of my revered Hijikata Toshizō, you inherit Lord Hijikata's good fortune in battle, which raises your odds of victory substantially. Besides, so what if it is a borrowed weapon? Nothing wrong with that. Borrowing during a necessary moment is more logical than preparing your own, right?"

"Yes, this is also easier and more handy."

Masatsugu smiled with delight. Rikka smiled back.

To be allies meant more than fighting alongside each other. During times of adversity, they also had to cooperate and offer mutual encouragement to lessen each other's burden. Most importantly, Masatsugu was struck by a sincere thought.

"It might be disrespectful for me to say this, but Rikka-dono, you are surely quite a fine woman."

"H-Hearing that from you... Incredibly, it does not feel bad at all."

The brave and fierce maiden blushed slightly.

Tachibana Masatsugu was certain that he was the first man to ever witness such an expression on Rikka's face. Feeling deeply satisfied, he proceeded to say suddenly, "A few days ago, I recalled a bit of my past. I used to have an ally back then. I'm not clear on the details, but... As both a soldier and as a man, he was a hero no less great than Prince Edward."

"Were you and he brothers-in-arms, Masatsugu-dono...?"

"Yes, we rode to the ends of the earth together, fighting hard for our liege. And now, it is plenty enough for me to have you by my side, Rikka-dono."

So what if it is a borrowed weapon—

Masatsugu smiled again. He really liked these words.

He smiled with a twitch of his cheek again. With such reliable allies by his side, ready to extend a helping hand at necessary moments, there was no need for him to prepare anything at all. Currently by the side of Masatsugu, whose identity was unknown, there was one such reliable girl by the side...

Masatsugu gazed at Rikka with affection and she reciprocated demurely.

Instantly, Masatsugu had a strange feeling. Normally, he would only reach a certain body temperature after resupplying ectoplasmic fluid—But unbelievably, he now felt his blood boiling.

This was no metaphor. He really felt hot and uncomfortable, as though the blood in his arteries and veins had reached boiling point.

"Masatsugu-dono, what is this..."

Rikka was surprised too. Close to him, she noticed the change as well.

She could not help but stroke Masatsugu's arm and face to confirm the temperature. Then she widened her eyes and looked straight at Masatsugu.

Masatsugu took her in his arms and said, "Rikka-dono, would you kindly listen to my request?"

Certain words surfaced in Masatsugu's mind. Borrowed weapons. Necessary moment. Ally.

The heat of blood. Fragments of memories. The best friend he missed sorely, XXX. At that moment, every blood vessel in Masatsugu's body was filled with powerful spiritual energy. His blood was also restless.

Masatsugu knew that these were signs of an awakening.

The situation was identical to when his power as a Chevalier awakened. Determination fixed upon the future, working in conjunction to a mystical environment with suitable conditions, had ushered in a revolutionary change—
"Please become my ally, sworn by blood."

"A-Ally?"

"Riding with me to the ends of the earth, sharing the same prey to partake in its flesh. Sharing glory and downfall together regardless of victory or defeat. A relationship that makes us siblings and friends at the same time."

Masatsugu rolled up the sleeve of his right arm.

He bit his wrist lightly. Blood seeped out from where the skin broke.

The raw wound was raised up in front of Rikka's eyes.

"If you are willing to accept... You and I can still move forward. Assuredly."

"Masatsugu-dono..."

Rikka slowly drew near him.

She drew near the bleeding wound on Masatsugu's wrist.

In fact, the answer had been decided long ago. Akigase Rikka would never refuse, hence the two of them were fit to become true allies.

Rikka's trembling lips touched the wound then she sucked the blood a little.

However, this was still not enough. Rikka understood that. She sucked harder, tasting the flavor of fresh blood. Masatsugu's blood was in her mouth and it spread from the tip of her tongue.

Next, she extended her tongue to lick blood from his wrist repeatedly.

The slow and gentle movements of her tongue was like using one's tongue to caress or treat a wound. Masatsugu noticed that his blood and mystical bond of fate was residing inside her.

"H-How is this...?"

"More than enough. Thank you, Rikka-dono."

The noble daughter was looking at Masatsugu with lips that were moist and red.

Of course, that was precisely Masatsugu's blood. Very grateful to Rikka for her devotion, Masatsugu accidentally did something impertinent.

He inadvertently drew near Rikka and kissed her red lips.

"Ah..."

There was a rusty taste on her lips, the taste of Masatsugu's blood.

Passionately, she licked and savored that taste. With feelings of gratitude and affection, Masatsugu sealed Rikka's lips, using his own tongue to lick away the blood.

Masatsugu's impertinent behavior did not stop there.

He even inserted his tongue into Rikka's mouth, probing around in search of Rikka's tongue to play with.

The taste of blood was on the tip of her tongue too. Soon after, he release Rikka and she murmured shyly, "B-By doing this, you make me very troubled..."

"My apologies. I will swear to heaven and promise never to do it again."

"Th-That would trouble me too. The dilemma stems from my position as the Governor General, but on a personal level, I..."

Rikka's tone was coy. It was Masatsugu's first time to hear her speaking in such a voice.

Masatsugu drew near and kissed her again. The Chevalier princess, whose swordsmanship could match any man's, accepted him gladly.

Part 5

The berserk Knights of the Garter had been overpowering the other three types of Legions for more than ten minutes.

The various Legions were drastically reduced in number.

Britain's black knights remained the biggest faction, numbering around seven hundred in total.

On the other hand, the Kanesadas, with katanas drawn, were down to two hundred and forty. Sticking to defense, the Centuriae only had a hundred and seventy of them remaining. The standard Kamuys led by Rikka numbered sixty — In total, the Tōkaidō-Roman coalition was roughly four hundred and seventy strong.

Locked in a chaotic battle, the numerical gap had surpassed two hundred. Furthermore, empowered by the Feat of Arms of slaughter, the seven hundred Garter Knights had clearly risen to a new level of strength.

At this rate, the British Empire would win for sure. The tide of the battle had settled mostly.

Unexpectedly, signal fires for a counterattack were lit in the coalition army too.

The fire originated at Akigase Rikka and the Legions under her command.

The remaining sixty Kamuys all glowed with blue light. Powerful noesis was turning into visible radiance.

Riding Masatsugu's wyvern, Chevalier Rikka issued orders from afar.

"Draw your bows."

Glowing blue, the Kamuys obeyed Rikka's command and got ready to attack.

They were no longer holding bayonet rifles. Instead, each of them was

equipped with a *small yellowish brown bow*, which looked like it was made of extremely hard timber.

The English longbows were very large and comparable to the black knights in height.

The bows equipped by the Kamuys were at most half as big. Nocking arrows of blue light onto the string of their small bows, they drew their bows hard to the limit, ready to release...

The sixty Kamuys led by Rikka were scattered across the battlefield.

"Release!"

The female Governor General commanded sternly and her entire army shot in unison.

All arrows met their mark, striking enemy troops, and in their vitals too. The arrows of blue light pierced the Garter Knights' weakspots in their helmets, masks, necks, armor gaps, chest, spine, *etc.*

Naturally, sixty black British Legions were shot down.

The blue Japanese archers nocked and drew again, pulling their short yellowish brown bows to the limit.

"Release again!"

Rapidly, another sixty black knights were rendered corpses.

One after another, the shot Garter Knights crashed into Mount Souun's ridge line. Although bows could not shoot as quickly as volley fire, these were still magic projectiles of superb power.

Unerring accuracy combined with the effect of one shot, one kill. They did not lose to the English longbow at all.

"What accurate bows and arrows..." Rikka whispered in amazement.

Currently, the sixty Kamuys were shooting arrows from within a chaotic battle.

Unless at close range where it was impossible to miss, the other Legions did not shoot for fear of friendly fire. However, Rikka's Kamuys boldly fired their

arrows, always meeting their mark regardless of distance.

"So this is your second Feat of Arms, Masatsugu-dono..."

"It is a Feat of Arms belonging both to me and my best friend from my past life. Borrowing the troops of my ally in this life, I have replicated that man's power."

"So your best friend was an amazing archer, huh..."

Indeed, Masatsugu had a faint recollection.

Both his past ally XXX and himself, nicknamed _____, were generals of equal strength, as well as famous archers honored as "Bow Gods."

"He and I were dogs serving the same lord. We used to ride across battlefields together."

"I see. So that is the 'Two-Headed Dog.' This title used to belong to you and he, and now—it belongs to you and I, Akigase Rikka!"

"Sure enough, Tachibana-dono's luck has not run out," Wei Qing smiled and murmured to himself.

Just now, the Kamuys, Legions of Imperial Japan, had equipped themselves with bows.

Until now, the Kamuys had been operating their bayonet rifles with experienced skill. After switching to short yellowish brown bows, their combat power became almost godly.

With one hundred percent accuracy, they released incomparably powerful arrows.

Witnessing the arrows' astounding power, the berserk Garter Knights started to swing their rifles to block. Some of the black knights even went as far to dodge with reckless abandon.

As a result, killing speed was much lowered.

However, the Kamuys' accurate shooting was still a huge threat.

Struck in their limbs and vulnerabilities one after another, the British Legions

were dealt a serious blow.

Some of the Garter Knights charged to attack, trying to stop the Kamuys from shooting their arrows. They tried to fire at close range or use melee to kill the Kamuys.

Fortunately, the red-purple Kanesadas rushed to their aid.

Blocking the rampaging black knights, they employed katanas and Japanese swordsmanship to chop through the pitch-black armor of the killers.

Amidst the chaotic battle, the Kamuys did not forget to demonstrate their godly marksmanship.

Even when a Kanesada's famed blade and a Garter Knights' bayonet rifle was locked in a contest of strength, the blue Japanese archers did not fear hurting their allies by accident.

In such a situation, the red-purple Legion's helmet was almost touching the helmet of the black knight.

However, the Kamuy's arrow struck the Garter Knight in the temple with unerring accuracy. Had the arrow deviated a few meters, it could have shot and killed a friendly soldier.

The Kanesadas and the Kamuys joined forces with fantastic tacit coordination.

Even the seasoned veteran Wei Qing was thoroughly impressed. Smiling, he ordered his Centuriae to attack all-out.

He had judged that it was the perfect opportunity to break the British army's spirit.

Finally, the tide of the battle began to turn.

The blood-red aura of the Garter Knights disappeared.

The terrifying Feat of Arms was interrupted, because the Black Prince made the call that fighting calmly would be more advantageous.

In fact, the British army pulled away some distance from the Tōkaidō-Roman coalition force.

After backing away, the Garter Knights formed a square wall formation,

glowing with the white particles of the protective barrier. The Kamuys fired arrows to attack the British army's secure defense.

Definitely doing its job, the protective barrier neutralized the arrows.

"Unlike the English longbow, arrows shot by the Kamuys' bows cannot penetrate barriers, huh?"

It was after Wei Qing comprehended the difference between the two.

A new army arrived in the sky over Mount Souun. Forty-odd Legions of the Tōkaidō provincial army had rushed over from the south as reinforcements.

Maintaining a spherical formation, they were the "Kurou Hougan" variant of Kamuy with elongated heads.

"Onii-sama, Rikka-sama! Thanks for hanging in there! I finally got here!"

Their commander, Tachibana Hatsune, accompanied them, riding a blue wyvern.

This girl was also the "little sister" of Tachibana Masatsugu the Resurrectee.

"I recall... The army that was invading Suzaku Gate, right?"

Prince Edward frowned with doubt.

He had just heard Morrigan report that an army of Kamuys with elongated heads had arrived at the battlefield.

This revelation surprised Edward a lot. Just earlier, when the Tōkaidō army's Legions launched a fierce attack with bows, the Black Prince had merely said "I see" calmly.

It was expected that Tachibana Masatsugu would take certain measures to resist.

Perhaps Edward was secretly celebrating inside too.

After that, the Black Prince calmly observed the enemy's "Feat of Arms of the bow." Disengaging the Garter Knights' "Chevaliers de Noir" state, he prepared to regroup.

Currently, he had been thinking for a few seconds with a perturbed look on

his face— "Morrigan, any news from Suzaku Gate... The defense force at the second tutelary fort?"

"Just one. Essentially that defenses cannot hold and they are about to start retreating..."

"That explains why that army could come over to converge with Tachibana-dono. This is far ahead of schedule, not even less than an hour."

Prior to the battle, Prince Edward had issued an order.

Each army would maintain defense at their respective tutelary fort for two hours.

Holding for two hours should not be a problem.

That was what Edward believed. He intended to defeat Tachibana Masatsugu within two hours then rush over to the four tutelary forts in turn to help out with defense. Little did he expect his calculations to fail.

To think that the Black Prince Edward, whose uncanny predictions seemed like prescience, would miscalculate!

"There can only be one... possible reason. That princess' outstanding talent has far surpassed Eleanor's expectations. So that is what happened."

Morrigan's doll was sitting on the Black Prince's shoulder. Despite its small size, the doll was equipped with a full set of noetic functions. Noticing the latest message, she immediately reported to the Black Prince.

"Message from the third tutelary fort... Lieutenant Colonel Grayson of Byakko Gate. Learning of Suzaku Gate's fall, the lieutenant colonel has made a suggestion."

"Speak."

"Please move your army to the third tutelary fort to recuperate for the time being... Once the resupply of ectoplasmic fluid is complete, face off with the enemy once more."

"...Byakko Gate is definitely not the place even if we are going to retreat."

"Eh?"

Morrigan was taken aback.

Edward said sadly, "It appears that this battle is over. Inform all our forces that we are abandoning the defense of Hakone to take up a new position. Let me see, let us head to Atsumi."

"Prince, you are retreating!?"

"Yes. At this rate, we will be surrounded and eliminated at Mount Souun. An irrevocable outcome will arise unless we make haste to escape while we have energy to spare."

The English aristocrat spoke with displeasure.

"It was my mistake. Too focused on Tachibana-dono, I failed to take precautions against his lady liege. Let this defeat be the punishment for my miscalculation..."

Saturday November 22nd, 16:13.

The location was near the south shore of Hakone's Lake Ashi. Today, the sky had not been very clear, but the heavy cloud cover finally dissipated to let through glimpses of sunlight.

However, the sun was about to set.

On the roof of a nation-protecting keep, Fujinomiya Shiori looked out at the sky of dusk.

This nation-protecting keep was situated at the second tutelary fort, Suzaku Gate. The genie dressed in a kimono, Rindou-sensei, was waiting by Shiori's side. Over their heads— "Well done, Princess. How praiseworthy."

"Only now do I dare confess. In actual fact, I was very worried... that I might fail to tame *this*."

A great phoenix with a wingspan of seventy meters had manifested in the sky.

Shining with golden brilliance the phoenix was one out of the merged divinity of the Four Gods. After breaking free from Morgan le Fay's control, the phoenix no longer had three eyes— This giant bird's master had switched to Fujinomiya Shiori, princess of Imperial Japan.

Epilogue

The intense battlefield of Hakone sank into darkness and peace after night fell.

All fighting had ceased by now.

Saturday November 22nd, 18:45.

The four tutelary forts protecting Hakone manifested four *golden guardian deities* out of thin air, illuminating their surroundings. These four guardians were especially conspicuous under the dark night—

In the sky over Seiryuu Gate in the east, a giant golden dragon with the "imperial" kanji on its forehead was twisting its gigantic body.

In the sky over Suzaku Gate in the south, a golden phoenix with wings spread had likewise appeared with the "imperial" kanji.

In the respective skies over Byakko Gate in the west and Genbu Gate in the north, a giant golden tiger and an enormous golden turtle with a snake for a tail, each with the "imperial" kanji on their forehead...

"Amazing, all these gods have become the princess' flunkies."

"It's better to call them 'guardian deities,' I think."

The Tachibana siblings were chatting in the sky over Hakone.

They were each riding their own blue wyvern, flying side by side in the night sky.

For the whole day today, dark clouds had shrouded the sky, but weather tended to change at moment's notice in mountainous regions. Currently, the moon's clear rays were falling upon the land.

The moon and scattered stars were bright in the sky without any clouds for miles.

The two wyverns were flapping their wings slowly under the moonlit sky.

Retainer beasts needed to have excellent night vision and an extraordinary sense of direction to be able to fly during the night.

If helicopters were placed in the same situation, pilots would not dare to fly without night equipment. This could be considered a drawback of "modern conveniences." Of course, for anyone apart from Chevaliers, flying exposed to mountain winds would be a type of torture...

"Onii-sama," Hatsune said after thinking for a moment. "Edward and his entourage—and the armies of the Restoration Alliance—have withdrawn from Hakone, right? Is it necessary to summon all of the Four Gods...?"

"You're right, it's not necessary."

They were flying five kilometers south of Lake Ashi.

However, Masatsugu's vision was excellent. Even from this location, he could see Hakone Yumoto, Lake Ashi's south and west shores, as well as the brilliant golden glow from the Four Gods in the sky over Sengokuhara.

"I heard that the display will last two or three hours as proof that Tōkaidō has taken Hakone. The process was also recorded to be used for *promotional purposes* in the future."

"The princess came up with this too?"

"That's right, Rikka-dono agreed before going to bed."

Borrowing Rikka's strength, Masatsugu had activated a new Feat of Arms—Two-Headed Dog.

This move was extremely draining. After the battle, Rikka could hardly stand. Leaving the aftermath for subordinates to handle, she had retired to bed quite early.

"The British Empire's prince fled so quickly. I had just arrived and was about to put on a grand performance."

Riding her wyvern next to her older brother, Hatsune sounded quite happy.

"But it feels great to see them routed. They've been beating down on us for

so long, but now we finally got our revenge!"

"Indeed, they fled very quickly," Masatsugu agreed and said to the little sister. "Hatsune, once you understand it as a move taken by an accomplished general who knows when to advance and retreat, you'll be full-fledged general too."

"R-Really?"

"Yes, that prince is really quite something."

"Speaking of outstanding abilities, our princess is amazing too, right? Rindou-sensei praised her so much."

"She praised the princess?"

"That's right. She said ordinary royal princesses lack sufficient spiritual rank, which means they would at most be able to order the Four Gods to disappear for the time being. Unable to act as Lord Tenryuu's representative, they cannot perform a resummoning. Considering the royal families across the entire world, you probably can't find another like her!"

"I see."

Masatsugu was well aware that their liege was not only outstanding in spiritual powers but also highly capable and full of resolve.

Fujinomiya Shiori sacrificed her lifespan on her own volition and obtained results accordingly. Had she not resummoned the great phoenix of the Four Gods to aid the Tōkaidō-Roman coalition, they would not have been able to capture the second tutelary fort, Suzaku Gate, within one hour.

This was what had thrown a wrench into Prince Edward's calculations.

In fact, back when he saw a thousand and two hundred Garter Knights gathered at the heart of Hakone, Masatsugu had said this.

If the speed with which they captured the four tutelary forts in the cardinal directions surpassed the Black Prince's expectations, victory in this battle would be secured.

After hearing that, Shiori had volunteered on her own accord to take care of the Four Gods.

...Back when Hatsune rushed to the battlefield to help out, the yellow dragon of the Four Gods had already descended upon Seiryuu Gate. After that, the Four Gods at Byakko Gate and Genbu Gate also manifested to fight the Restoration Alliance.

Prince Edward had swiftly led his entire army to retreat before all four of them could manifest.

Had he been a step late, the Kamuys and the Centuriae coming from the four cardinal directions would have been able to surround and wipe out the Knights of the Garter.

Unfortunately, the English prince had withdrawn from the battlefield before the encirclement could be completed.

Roughly four hundred and eighty Garter Knights formed a spherical formation and fled southwest.

Along the way, they converged with British forces that had retreated from the tutelary forts, running away in an orderly fashion. Seeing that, Masatsugu did not give the order to pursue.

This was because he knew instinctively that further fighting would only result in mutual annihilation.

"Now that the princess has subjugated Hakone and the Four Gods in this manner, for better or worse, everyone's view of her will change completely. Hatsune, we need to prepare ourselves too."

"I got it! By the way, Onii-sama what are we doing here?"

The two of them had arrived at an area in the southern end of Hakone.

Masatsugu stopped his wyvern near the peak of Jikkokutoge Pass. Imitating him, Hatsune ordered her wyvern to land too. Walking south from here, one would reach Izu and the area of Atsumi.

With their two wyverns crouching on the ground on standby, they began to walk forward.

"I have an appointment with someone. After the battle ended, the command center at Suzaku Gate received a message."

"An appointment with who?"

"You'll know shortly."

The peak of Jikkokutoge Pass had a cable car terminus.

Due to the battle between the Restoration Alliance and the Tōkaidō-Roman coalition, the sightseeing cable car was not in operation today. In front of the entrance to the terminus was a tall figure.

Seeing the person whom Masatsugu had agreed to meet, Hatsune jumped in fright.

"I wonder if I should say 'it's been a while'? After all, we were fighting in an intense battle only hours ago."

"As for an actual encounter, it happens to be one month ago."

The other party was Edward the Black Prince, dressed in Britain's black military uniform—

Edward was leaning against the wall of the terminus, smiling elegantly. The legendary crown prince also smiled at Hatsune, who was standing behind Masatsugu in shock. He said, "I came alone. If I brought a follower along, she would probably mock and ridicule me to no end."

"To think that someone is tough enough to dare mock and ridicule you? No wonder Britain is so powerful."

"Personally, I would prefer if my companion could be a little more polite with me."

"So, what business do you have with me?"

"I just wanted to chat. Think of it as sharing our thoughts about the battle just now. Wouldn't it be nice to do this once in a while?"

"Yes, I suppose."

"Uh, umm... May I say something?"

Hatsune raised her hand timidly, seeking permission to speak. Masatsugu and the Black Prince nodded, encouraging her to continue.

"Isn't it inappropriate for the two sides to meet in secret after a battle...?"

"Why? We're not colluding in conspiracy."

"The battle is long over. It's fine as long as you don't tell anyone."

"Uh, aren't either of you afraid of the other side setting an ambush with assassins or snipers?"

"We can read noesis. Any ambush force will be found immediately."

"Besides, we are not people who'll submit and die without a fight, trying to set up an ambush would be totally a waste of time and energy."

"...In other words, this is one of those?"

Hatsune sighed in a rare moment and said solemnly, "The kind of relationship where one discards their allegiances after a battle to gather for a discussion of heroes over wine, then resuming hostilities another day. You guys are doing this with inspiring stories from turbulent times in mind, right?"

"This little lady is quite amusing."

Edward smiled.

"Tachibana-dono—You definitely bested me on this occasion, and not just you, but your princess too."

"You are truly impressive for discerning this."

"You are too kind. I was amazed to learn that Imperial Japan had such a capable princess. Furthermore... Hohohoho, her existence inspired me with a few ideas. For example, knowing that someone talented as her is involved, we might have to change the way we interact with Tōkaidō."

"So that is why you asked to meet me here?"

"Not exactly. However, Tachibana-dono, I am well aware of the reason why your faction rushed to capture Hakone before Lord Caesar's arrival. Let us discuss this a later time."

"....."

Although the Eastern Roman Empire was Japan's ally, it was definitely not a friendly nation. It would not be wrong to call it a potential enemy.

On the other hand, the British Empire was the official enemy. As the saying

went, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." The dialogue between Masatsugu and the Black Prince was brief and concise, but conveyed plenty between the lines.

Masatsugu was willing to meet him precisely because he expected such a development.

That being said, he had no intention of making any decisions here. It was presumably the same for the other party. Masatsugu did not give a clear answer and Edward simply stared leisurely into the night sky.

"Oh right, there is another matter." The Black Prince's tone turned serious, losing his earlier levity. "The battle today... It is true that my side withdrew from Hakone. This I concede. However, you only managed to make it this far by borrowing your liege's aid. At the conclusion of the battle, if one were to compare the state of our armies—My order of knights was still in better condition, wouldn't you agree?"

Edward's face was solemn while he sought Masatsugu's agreement.

"In light of the aforementioned points, I believe that for today's battle, regarding the showdown between you and me... It was a draw, possibly in my favor, perhaps."

"On the contrary."

Masatsugu denied the claim outwardly but his thoughts differed.

In the end, only two hundred Kanesadas remained while Wei Qing's Centuriae were down to a hundred and twenty. Fewer than forty of Rikka's Kamuys survived—

Undeniably, *in terms of surviving numbers*, the Garter Knights were in better shape.

Edward's claim had some logical merit and was not simply the words of a sore loser. Naturally, Masatsugu did not voice these thoughts. He simply replied indifferently, "In the end, we are the ones staying in Hakone, so there victor can be no one but me."

"No, no, this is still disputable. Let us find a venue to settle this debate some

time soon. By the way... It would be nice to find somewhere in Atsumi or Hakone to hold a discussion while enjoying a hot spring."

"What?"

"If permitted by the situation when the time comes, I would like to meet your princess too," Edward added confidently at the end with a mischievous smile.

After retaking Hakone successfully, Shiori was extremely exhausted.

Akigase Rikka had strained herself too much during the battle and retired for the night early. Seeing that Rikka had gone to bed, the victorious princess found a bedroom in the second tutelary fort as well and hastily lay down to recover her energy—A couple of hours had passed by the time she woke up again.

"Princess, are you able to rise?"

"Sensei... Y-Yes, I am fine—"

Dressed in a kimono, Rindou-sensei had entered the room.

This was a room reserved exclusively for high-ranking officers. For a military facility, the furniture such as the sofa, the table and chairs were very luxurious. Shiori's mentor and guardian was sitting on the sofa, having a drink.

Shiori sighed lightly and sat up.

Her body still felt a bit heavy, presumably due to the effects of invoking the master-servant enchanted ritual of the Four Gods.

However, she could still manage to move her limbs. She walked over to Rindou-sensei. By On the table, there was a red gourd and a porcelain dish along with a sheet of Japanese paper.

A blue liquid had been poured into the dish—Artificial ectoplasmic fluid.

Looking at Shiori's face, Sensei put down her wine cup and picked up the Japanese paper on the table.

"By any chance, Sensei... Are you going to use spirit vision?"

"After observing today's battle, a few vague notions have occurred to me. There might be a chance right now to receive an oracle, so as to elucidate that

undead one's true identity."

Shiori secretly jumped in surprise. Ignoring her surprise, Rindou-sensei tore the paper into dozens of pieces and scattered them in the air.

Three of the paper fragments fell into the blue ectoplasmic fluid in the dish.

A Chinese character appeared on each fragment, respectively BU, SU, and TAI.

Having performed a divination to seek an oracle, Rindou-sensei went "hmp" and picked up the gourd on the table. Without pouring the wine into her cup, she drank directly from it.

"What is this? Totally incomprehensible."

"These three characters... probably give Masatsugu-sama's name."

As soon as Shiori spoke, Sensei's gaze turned sharp.

"Princess, you already have some idea as to his identity, don't you?"

"Until now... I had no concrete evidence. However, I discovered several clues. First of all, he might be a general who led a cavalry army. Secondly, he commands his troops logically and appropriately, and also moves swiftly with decisiveness."

Shiori calmly explained.

"Accepting all available weapons at his disposal—whether a samurai's katana, the name of Hijikata Toshizō, a destroyer from Britain... He used all of them without any prejudice. Moreover, there is the issue of his tactics."

"Oh?"

"The tactics he used last time against Richard the Lionheart, as well as what he employed against Hakone this time, both had similar precedents in the ancient past. For example, two battles... One at Liegnitz in the past, in other words, the area where the village of Wahlstatt was later built, and another that took place on the Sajó River's shore."

Floating on the blue ectoplasmic fluid were three fragments of paper.

Shiori reached out with her index finger and arranged the order into SU, BU, TAI.

"He was the trusted retainer and favorite pupil of the greatest emperor in history. Even centuries later, the German knight Sir Rommel, nicknamed the Desert Fox, would imitate his strategies—I believe this ought to be his true name."

Afterword

Hello again, everyone.

The "*Romance of the Three Kingdoms* set on a fictional 20th-century stage plus armies of giants" has reached its third volume.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to my readers' loving support as well as all the help from everyone involved in the publishing process. Many accidents came up this time and I'm sorry for the trouble caused to everyone.

Also due to chance circumstances, I was also looked after by friends at Shizuoka News.

Thank you for telling me so many things about Shizuoka, they were very informative. The black hanpen fish cake with Worcestershire sauce was truly eye opening. What a new discovery.

In this 3rd volume, a new character from Chinese history has debuted at last.

This man has appeared briefly in world history or Chinese textbooks. The legendary first half of his life happened just as I described in the novel. He sometimes makes appearances in Beijing opera or Chinese historical dramas. It was said that his personality was very modest and reserved.

Since there are too many characters in this story who love to show up, it feels quite refreshing to write a character of the opposite type (wry smile).

Also, due to book length, I haven't included a glossary this time as I've done in previous volumes. Notes on the "Battle of Crécy" and "let's have a beer first" are on DX Bunko's official site while "the relationship between heavy infantry and oblique order" had to be omitted due to length. If there's space in Volume 4, I'll add them to the collection.

By the way, I mentioned something in Volume 2's afterword.

Namely, the provision of fanservice from the male characters, but unfortunately, I failed to deliver on my promise in time for Volume 3. Fortunately, this gave rise to a natural development so perhaps it might be actualized in Volume 4. What I want to write about is not just two men but it'd be a nice idea to bring together all major male characters (such as the balding guy, the blond middle-aged guy with too much fat, or the low-key cool handsome guy) for an open-air bath party. Recently, this is what's been troubling me.

Anyway, a hot spring episode is planned for Volume 4.

Now considering the passage of time, I guess it's almost time for the beauty contest event, right?

...Oh dear, why does it feel like I'm writing "an ordinary school romantic comedy"?

As for specifics, what kinds of scenes will I include? What illustrations will be drawn for the male character fanservice? Please do check it out in Volume 4, dear readers.